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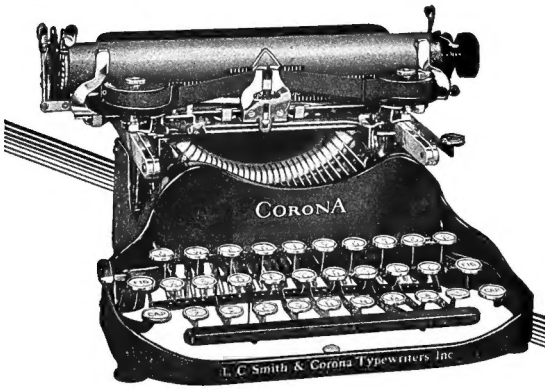

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Six Months to Live

By LILLIAN AVERNE CLARK

WHAT would he be like, this "Box 879," whose strange advertisement for "a single young woman on the verge of death," Shirley Grant had answered? With a nervous gesture the girl pushed back the soft golden curls clinging damply to her forehead and cast an apprehensive glance toward the door of her small apartment.

Undoubtedly she had been terribly rash in making known her willingness to marry this man; but what did it matter when one's earthly existence—barring all shocks, which might snap the thread of life sooner—was limited to a possible six months?

Under such circumstances, Shirley could afford to be reckless. Even to the point of marrying this stranger. As a husband, good or bad, he could not materially affect her; she would probably never see him again after the marriage ceremony.

In any event, this proposition was the only thing that offered itself as a relief from her present financial difficulties, now that she was no longer able to keep up her work in the department store. The monthly allowance that would be hers as the wife of "Box 879," carried with it an assurance of independence, which would mean much during the bleak months while she awaited death. And the only stipulation was that she should die on this unknown husband's hands; presumably, the sooner the better.

The letters following Shirley's answer to the "personal" had not put the cold-blooded proposition so bluntly; nevertheless, it was there.

Prior to sending in her application, Shirley had again visited Dr. Morgan, whose patient she had been for almost a year. She must make certain before taking this step that her life, outside the few remaining months, was practically ended.

The white-haired physician had confirmed his earlier opinion, adding by way of comfort, that at twenty most anything might happen—Shirley must not lose hope altogether.

"I am glad," she said slowly, deliberately, "that you don't— look—ill"

But the girl had not been deceived. Nor had she greatly cared in this city of strangers to which she had fled two years before when a father's unwise speculations followed by his death had left her penniless.

Now, with hands tightly folded in her lap, she awaited the personal interview with "Box 879" that was to complete the final arrangements.

WHEN the buzzer at last sounded, the girl for a moment sat rigid in her chair, then slowly rose to her feet, crossed the room and opened the door.

She drew a breath of relief at sight of a strikingly beautiful young woman, slim and tall, with a hint of the Latin in her dark skin and sleek raven hair. There was something in the movements of her sinuous form that suggested the serpent to Shirley, which was supplemented by the heavy-lidded glittering black eyes that swept over her in close scrutiny.

"Miss Grant?" The voice had a husky but pleasing quality.

Shirley nodded and opened the door wider: "Won't you come in?"

The woman glided into the room.

"I'm Miss Randolph, Florine Randolph—Box 879, with whom you have been corresponding," she announced as she slid her long, smoothly-clad body into a chair.

"Oh," gasped Shirley, "I thought it was a man!"

"So far as you're concerned, it is," said the visitor tersely. "It happens that Trent Mortimer, the gentleman in question, and my fiancé, didn't know of the plans I'd made for him until a few hours ago." She smiled reminis-

cently, then flashed a sharp glance at the girl. "I'm glad you don't look ill. If Trent weren't so silly about such things, he could have been made a widower at once by marrying one of the deathbed applicants. Now, getting down to business, Miss Grant, you're willing to go through with this?"

Shirley flushed: "Yes — provided, of course, that I'm to be a wife in name only."

"Absolutely. The conditions will be stated in a contract—you to be a mere figurehead, though legally married."

"There will be no objections to my going away alone after the ceremony?" Shirley put the question hopefully.

Miss Randolph shook her head. "It's not so easy as all that. The document making this marriage necessary states plainly that the husband and wife are to dwell under the same roof until death."

"Oh-h-h!" Shirley's eyes widened.

The young woman opposite leisurely lighted a cigarette, crossed one silken leg over the other, and exhaled a cloud of bluish smoke before continuing:

"On my way here I stopped to see the heart specialist to whom you referred in your application. His report of your condition is perfectly satisfactory."

Satisfactory!

A wave of indignation swept over Shirley. But it was momentary. She must accustom herself to the callousness of people interested in her only so far as the shortness of her life was concerned. Her voice, as she spoke, was as coldly impersonal as the visitor's own.

"All that remains, then, Miss Randolph, is for the gentleman to approve your choice—"

"I anticipate no trouble there. Trent's a good sport, though a little sulky that I'm dragging him into a marriage with a stranger instead of taking him myself and letting the Mortimer possessions go."

"It sounds very complicated." Shirley looked perplexed.

"Not at all." Miss Randolph flicked the ashes from her cigarette. "It's like this. Trent Mortimer's father was disinherited to start with, and the Mortimer money all went to his father's sister Hester, a detestable old cat. Upon the death of Trent's parents when he was twelve, he came to live with Hester at Briermere, the home of the Mortimers for a century. My people have a country place near by, and Trent and I grew up together; later we became engaged."

The visitor's face darkened with some passing emotion, and a frown still lingered as she resumed: "Hester and I hated each other. She was furious over the engagement. At her death, some months ago, a will was found whereby Briermere and the Mortimer wealth were to pass into the hands of an Egyptian exploring society—a hobby of Hester's—unless Trent was married to a girl other than myself before he was twenty-five, which will be within a few days. She apparently relied upon the Mortimer honor to keep Trent loyal to the woman he married, and I naturally would be relegated to the background."

"Oh, I'm beginning to understand, now!" exclaimed Shirley. "Not until the wife dies will everything be made all right for you to marry this man."

"Exactly. In the meantime Hester's plans will be carried out to the letter, thanks to me, but with a twist which should make her writhe in her grave. In the end Trent will marry me, the Mortimer money remains in

our hands, and I"—her eyes gleamed vindictively—"I shall have outwitted the detested Hester."

The woman relapsed into a brooding silence for a time, then, with a shrug, rose to her feet as she concluded: "While Trent isn't wholly in sympathy with my plan, he has agreed to go through with it, and now that everything's understood, shall we have him come up?"

Shirley nodded and sank back in her chair as the visitor left the room. It was something more of an ordeal than she had expected.

"MISS GRANT, Mr. Mortimer." Florine Randolph's manner was gracious as she ushered forward a good-looking young man with crisp dark hair and a healthily-tinted skin who bent over Shirley's hand, murmuring a polite acknowledgment of the introduction.

The girl's fears seemed to vanish as she met the gaze of his level gray eyes.

"Well, what do you say, Trent?" Florine's voice injected itself abruptly into the stillness that followed.

The young man who had been studying Shirley intently raised a deprecating hand. "My dear Florine, the matter has gone quite too far for me to do otherwise than agree. If Miss Grant will do me the honor, I would suggest that we be married immediately."

"Good!" Florine's dark face glowed with satisfaction. "That's that. And now let's get through with the rest of it as quickly as possible."

The two hours that followed seemed as a dream to Shirley, and it was not until she found herself facing a minister that the full significance of what she was about to do burst upon her. For a moment she was tempted to cry out that she could not go on, and with a panicky feeling turned toward Trent. His gentle reassuring smile calmed her fears and gradually she grew quiet. Only at the words "Until death do us part," did her voice falter and her eyes grow misty.

When the ceremony was over, Shirley's husband guided her from the room. Immediately came the sound of Florine's voice as she slipped her hand through Trent's free arm.

"I wonder if Hester when she was alive ever heard of 'the best laid plans of mice and men—'" Her eyes sought the man's and a soft little laugh bubbled on her lips.

A feeling of depression stole over the young bride. From now on these two would look upon her as something that kept them apart. They would be watching constantly for the first sign of her approaching death. When it came, instead of sadness, there would be rejoicing, and Florine would again give a little bubbling laugh.

"If you don't mind, I should like to go back to my apartment." Shirley's voice was low as she made her modest request. "I—I have some packing to do—if I'm leaving to-morrow."

"Quite all right with us, dear," assured Florine in dulcet tones. "Now that the ceremony's over, there's really nothing else so far as you're concerned."

"I'm not so sure about that," commented Trent with a kindly smile as his eyes rested upon Shirley. "It may be that a husband would like his bride to dine with him on their wedding day."

"Oh, no, no!" A wave of color dyed the young bride's clear skin. "You must not now, nor at any other time let my presence interfere with

your plans, Mr. Mortimer. I quite understand that our marriage was strictly a business contract, and as such I choose to regard it."

"You see, Trent, that no gallantries are expected," remarked Florine sweetly.

Alone in her apartment the unhappy girl bride watched the lovers drive away. When they had passed from sight she threw herself upon her bed and wept unrestrainedly, forgetting for the moment the conditions that had brought her marriage about—forgetting everything but the fact that it was her wedding day, the day of which all young girls dream, and she was desolate.

By the time her husband called for her the following morning, Shirley was calm and collected, and thanked him shyly for the sheaf of roses that had arrived the evening before.

Florine was at the station to see them off, and apparently still in high spirits over the success of her plans. She kissed Trent in parting, and her eyes gave token of her satisfaction as they rested on his white-faced bride.

As the train pulled out leaving the resourceful Florine behind, Shirley experienced a sense of relief. Trent made his wife comfortable in the section assigned her, indicating that his own was within call, across the aisle. Occasionally he sat at her side, chatting or reading, his manner putting the girl entirely at her ease.

AS evening drew down they alighted at Edgewater, the town nearest Briermere, where a rosy-faced man approached them with a welcoming grin.

"Hello, Tim," called Trent with an answering smile. "You got my wire, I see. This is Tim Dolan, Shirley, my right-hand man at Briermere; and, Tim, this is Mrs. Mortimer, your new mistress."

Tim bowed awkwardly, then busied himself with the luggage, while Trent conducted Shirley to a long green car drawn up to the curb.

The ride through the country was delightful, and the girl drew a deep breath of satisfaction as she caught the glimmer of water in the distance.

"The Briermere acres have the sea on three sides," explained Trent, following her gaze.

"Oh, I think I shall love it here!" cried Shirley, her eyes sparkling.

"I like it rather well myself," admitted her companion boyishly. "The air and quiet ought to do you a world of good," he added, his strong hand closing over hers for a brief instant.

Shirley gave him a puzzled look. How could he forget the circumstances which had placed her at Briermere? At this very moment an uneasy feeling around her heart was sending out warnings. She must fight it off—it would be terribly embarrassing if she were to faint just now.

But Trent seemed not to notice and went on pleasantly: "We live very modestly here, though as a commercial artist I make quite a bit—enough to support a wife without the aid of the Mortimer income."

The car drew up at the entrance. Trent's arm went about his wife in assisting her to alight and remained there when they entered the wide hall where the line-up of servants smiled friendly greetings as the master presented his bride. Shirley, smiling in return, murmured words that sounded meaningless in her own ears, all the time battling desperately against the faintness that was creeping over her.

"Mrs. Mortimer's room is ready."

The housekeeper with a little curtsy led the way to the broad polished staircase.

Shirley gave a despairing glance at the long flight of steps, but followed the woman bravely, as the other servants disappeared through the rear door in the hall.

He caught the shuddering girl in his arms and faced the black thing

On the first step the girl swayed weakly and clung to the rail. Instantly Trent was at her side. "You're ill—oh, I'm sorry," he exclaimed. "I'm afraid the long ride was too much for you." He lifted her in his arms and lightly carried her up the stairs to an apartment above, where he placed her on a bed. He then vanished through a connecting door while the housekeeper removed Shirley's hat and covered her with a blanket. She stepped aside as Trent appeared with a small glass of cordial which he held to the girl's lips.

Shirley swallowed it mechanically, and the blood seemed again to course through her numb body. She was too weak to talk, but lifted her eyes grate-

fully to the man bending over her, then with a little sigh snuggled her cheek against the pillow and fell into a heavy sleep.

Not until the evening shadows darkened the corners of the room did Shirley awaken. The exhaustion which had overpowered her was gone, and with a quick movement she was out on the floor gazing about her curiously.

The room was large and luxuriously furnished. Its space and harmony of soft coloring were decidedly restful to the girl after the crowding walls and bleakness of her small apartment in the city. Through the windows she could see the red glow of an ocean sunset.

The connecting door stood open and Shirley's breath quickened as she caught sight of her husband in the adjoining room. He laid aside the book he was reading and came forward.

"Feeling better?" he inquired cheerily.

"I'm quite all right, thank you," replied Shirley composedly, though her cheeks burned under his gaze. "I appreciate your kindness very much, but —but you mustn't think that you are expected to look after me in any way, Mr. Mortimer."

"Trent, if you please," he corrected with a whimsical smile. "It will be perfectly safe to drop your formal manner, Shirley, as I shall not presume upon the circumstances that have placed you here as my wife. For your own sake it might be better that we maintain, outwardly at least, a friendly attitude toward each other—"

"But why shouldn't we be friends —real friends?" interrupted Shirley, her eyes wistful.

"Why not, indeed!" Her husband held out his hand and she placed hers within it. For a moment they stood smiling at each other, then drew apart.

"And now I shall send Nora to help you unpack—in the meantime, you should have a fire." Trent stooped and applied a match to the wood in the grate laid ready for lighting. It caught immediately and the flames dancing up cast a cheerful glow over the darkening room and the man's strong face as he looked down gravely upon the bit of fragile loveliness before him.

"I'm hoping that you will be content here, Shirley," he said earnestly. "And while I shall not intrude, yet I expect you to call me when you need me—remember, we're friends."

The girl nodded silently, her eyes on the fire.

A WEEK slipped by of cold March winds, during which time the frail young mistress of Briermere spent many hours curled up on a couch near the library fire. Trent, in his easy manner, often dropped in to chat or perhaps read aloud. Once he brought his work and sat in a far corner of the room, seemingly absorbed, though frequently the girl caught his eyes fixed upon her with an inscrutable expression in their depths.

Came sunshiny days, warm and filled with the fragrant greenness of spring, when Shirley wandered about the beautiful grounds of the estate, or sat on the beach, never tiring of the sea and its soothing murmur.

Trent sometimes accompanied her on these rambles, gravely curtailing them when there was a question of overtaxing her strength. Their relations were friendly, nothing more; the man at no time making any attempt to pierce the wall of his wife's deliberate reserve.

But Shirley was happy just to be near him, and because of this happiness, there burned within her a fierce

resolve to live every moment that might still be hers.

When Trent journeyed to the city for a few days, Shirley missed him more than she cared to admit even to herself. He had gone up on business, but he would see Florine.

The young wife could visualize the lovers together. Trent would probably take Florine in his arms—strong arms. Shirley recalled the ease with which they had carried her up the stairs on the day of her arrival at Briermere. Arms, too, that could hold one most tenderly—the fortunate Florine could nestle in them, secure in the love of the man who held her—

Suddenly the mistress of Briermere burst into tears. She wanted Trent Mortimer as she had never wanted anything before—the man who was patiently biding his time until she should die!

When her husband returned, Shirley's calm greeting betrayed nothing of the emotion that stirred within her, nor did her suddenly-veiled eyes disclose the light that leaped into them when he presented the huge box of bonbons he had brought from town. He had remembered her—the girl who stood between him and the woman he loved!

In the early summer Florine's people came down from the city to their country home. Thereafter it became a regular thing for the beautiful Florine to drop in daily on the Mortimers.

It was on one of these visits that she strolled up to where Shirley was lying in a hammock, dreamily watching the white-capped waves rushing shoreward.

"Ah, resting again?" began Florine by way of greeting. "You do quite a bit of that, I'm thinking."

"Briermere's a wonderful place to rest in," replied Shirley with quiet enthusiasm. "Why, I feel a different person since coming here—" She paused and bit her lip.

"And you look it, too," admitted Florine moodily; "but I don't suppose looks will prolong your life any."

A moment later she added amiably: "As for Briermere, you're lucky to be here at all, Shirley. It's worth a fortune just as it is—nothing like it in the whole country. If Trent weren't such a fool he could be living like a prince. But never mind, things will be vastly changed by and by."

Florine smiled complacently as her eyes roved over the landscape. She was still in a high good humor when Trent joined them shortly after.

As was her habit, Shirley left the lovers to themselves and walked slowly back to the house. In her room she paused before a mirror and gazed at her reflection with something like reproach.

No wonder Florine frowned upon her so often these days. Shirley's appearance had undergone a change during the past months. The glass reflected a girl absurdly young, with sparkling eyes and cheeks that had lost their whiteness in the glow of health.

She turned from the mirror hastily. What a mockery it was!

ALL too soon came the final month of the possible six allotted Shirley by Dr. Morgan. Its weeks flew by with incredible swiftness, the girl toward the last becoming decidedly unstrung.

Florine, too, seemed nervous; at times giving vent to little impatiences, even with Trent. Then again she was wildly gay. With her exotic beauty she was not unlike a gorgeous butterfly as she flitted among the flowers.

But frequently the butterfly took on the shape of a vulture and swooped down upon the young wife most unexpectedly, her sloe black eyes merciless as they watched and waited.

It was on one of these occasions that Shirley, stretched out motionless on a bench as she rested after a long walk, opened her eyes suddenly to find Florine bending over her. Immediately a look of disappointment swept over the dark face.

"Go away—you are always hoping to find me dead!" cried Shirley hysterically, as she pushed the woman aside and bounded to her feet. "You can't make me die any sooner by hounding me, Florine. Oh, I'm so unhappy!"

"Well, what of it—maybe you think I am—maybe you think Trent's wildly happy the way things are!" Florine gave the girl a scathing look which spoke volumes.

At the mention of her husband's name, Shirley caught her breath with a little stab of pain. Somehow she had not thought of Trent as unhappy—and yet there were nights when she heard him walking the floor for hours at a time! What a fool she had been not to have known!

Turning from Florine, she stumbled blindly toward the house and up to her lonely room.

The seventh month slipped by, and still the mistress of Briermere lingered, apparently no nearer death than before. There was a noticeable air of restraint about the lovers, and Shirley, like a guilty thing, sought to hide herself from them whenever possible. Quite often she remained in her room for hours at a time. Florine's eyes were always accusing these days, but Shirley derived some comfort from the fact that not once had her husband evinced any impatience in the trying situation.

Then came a time when even this solace was denied her.

They had met in the hall. Trent had greeted her cheerily, as was his way. Shirley noted a look of weariness in his eyes. As they gazed for a moment at each other, the man's face had suddenly changed. "God, Shirley," he exclaimed huskily; "I can't go on like this — something must be done! You are growing better, and it seems only right that I should speak—"

The girl's hands went up as if warding off a blow. "Please, please, don't say anything more," she cried brokenly. "I know how you feel, but I'm not to b-blame—and—and it wasn't in our contract that I should be made suffer—"

"Forgive me, Shirley." Trent's tones conveyed remorse, but his wife scarcely heard him as she fled toward her room. In its privacy she flung herself face downward on the bed, her sobs muffled in the pillows.

It was unbelievable that the man she loved so dearly should think something must be done because she lingered a few paltry weeks longer than expected! Could he have been suggesting suicide? Impossible. Oh, why had she ever answered that horrible advertisement which had placed her in this house of torture! And Trent had said she was getting better—how closely he must have been watching her to arrive at this conclusion! True, she was stronger—it had been weeks since she had her last spell of exhaustion. At this rate she might last a year—maybe five—ten—perhaps live to a ripe old age!

The girl broke into a peal of hysterical laughter, then sat up, sobered at the thought. Something, indeed,

must be done, but first she would see Dr. Morgan.

THE following morning Tim drove a wan-looking Shirley to the station. She had left a note for Trent, stating that she had gone to the city on business, and would return the next day.

Dr. Morgan made no attempt to hide his amazement when the girl appeared at his office, where she submitted to a thorough examination and numerous questions. After poring over the record of her case a second time, the white-haired physician beamed his satisfaction.

"You are to be congratulated, my child, on your extraordinary improvement—there is scarcely a symptom of your old trouble left. Continue your present mode of living—"

The doctor broke off abruptly, as if aware that his patient was not listening.

Nor was she. Stunned by the news, the girl sat motionless, experiencing no particular pleasure in her new lease of life, which only complicated her troubles at Briermere. It was with a heavy heart that Shirley left the office of Dr. Morgan.

If she only dared to run away. But that would cause Trent to lose both Briermere and the Mortimer fortune—perhaps Florine, also. Had she not before refused to marry him when it meant the forfeit of his worldly goods? Come what might, Shirley must live up to her contract and remain with her husband.

Trent met his wife at the station on her return from the city, but manifested no curiosity as to the business that had taken her there. Nor did she enlighten him. Why add to the hopelessness of the situation.

Toward evening on that same day, Shirley, weary of trying to solve her vexing problem, stepped out on a balcony for a breath of fresh air. Her head ached, but this at least would give her an excuse for not going down to dinner and meeting Florine who was spending the night at Briermere, her own people being away.

"Ah, here you are!" Shirley turned quickly and faced Florine herself. The older girl stepped from a French window to the balcony.

"Oh, you startled me!" Shirley breathed quickly.

"Really, my dear, you must guard against shocks—they sometimes prove fatal in cases like yours," bantered Florine with a mocking smile, and then added quickly as Shirley turned away:

"Don't go yet; I saw you from the grounds and came up to talk to you. I know you went to see the doctor—a fool could guess that. What did he say?"

Shirley hesitated, dreading the possible effect of her news. It might be better to defer the telling of the actual facts until another time.

"Dr. Morgan was astonished to find me still living," she replied evasively.

"That was nice of him." Florine again spoke banteringly, but her fingers closed over the balcony rail in a tight grip and for some moments she stared gloomily into space.

Shirley stole away to her room where she remained the entire evening, sending back untouched the tray of food Trent sent up.

Never had she been so depressed. She leaned on a window sill and stared into the night. What was to be the end of all this? Trent was tired of waiting to be free. He had said something must be done—but what? Over and over again the question beat with

maddening persistency in her brain. There were distracted moments when the sea offered the only answer. She would fling herself into it and be carried far out. But no, for Trent's sake it must appear as an accident—perhaps to-morrow—in a skiff—but not now—not now! And Shirley laid her throbbing head upon her folded arms and wept aloud.

WHEN she sought her bed it was to toss about wakefully, but at last she fell into a restless, troubled sleep.

Hours later she woke with a feeling of fright and sat up trembling. Little beaded drops sprang out on her forehead. In the grayish darkness some sinister presence lurked. She felt it, even before it resolved itself into a thing that slowly moved toward her.

The girl drew in a terrified breath, and her heart seemed to flutter feebly up to her throat. She felt herself choking as she stared in fascinated horror. The black shape drew closer, and she saw it carried in an outstretched hand its head—a hideous grinning skull with fiery eyes!

An iciness crept over Shirley. She was sinking—sinking—the sound of a footstep in the adjoining room stayed her reeling senses—Trent! The bonds that seemed to hold her powerless snapped instantly, and with a stifled cry, she leaped from her bed and hurled herself against the connecting door of her husband's room. It opened instantly—he had heard her cry. With an exclamation of concern he caught her up in his arms almost fiercely and held her close.

For a brief instant Shirley clung to him wildly and then felt herself placed in a chair. Trent had become aware of the ghostly figure whose dash toward the hall door was slowed up somewhat by the flowing drapery catching on a rocker and dragging it along.

A skull with phosphorus sockets clattered to the floor as the black form darted to one side in a desperate effort to evade the man. But like a panther he leaped forward. Then came a woman's shrill cry of rage and fear as Trent's arms closed about her. She fought frantically to escape, but he held her fast and tore away the concealing black mask, revealing in the flood of light that came from his room through the connecting door, the sleek head and distorted face of Florine.

With a smothered exclamation Trent started back, his arms dropping heavily to his sides.

"You—Florine! Good God!"

Unmindful of Shirley's presence, the black-draped woman sprang forward and attempted to twine her arms about his neck. "Trent, darling, don't look at me that way—"

He flung her off almost roughly, drawing back.

Florine began to weep passionately. "Trent, you mustn't—we love each other! I didn't—why, it was just a joke—"

The man laughed harshly. "Spare yourself, Florine. I understand perfectly. You hoped the shock would kill Shirley!"

"Oh, Trent, you must forgive me—I love you!" Florine again made an attempt to throw her arms about his neck, but he sternly repulsed her.

"Keep off, Florine—God, if you were but a man for a few moments!" His hands clenched.

The woman drew away instantly, her eyes blazing. "Cut out the dramatics, Trent. You know that you're as bitterly disappointed as I that my plan failed—"

"Florine, you must be mad! Good God, how could I have been so blind!" A dark red suffused his face and he seemed to struggle against the fury that surged up within him.

"Get out—get out, before I forget that you are a woman, and bear in mind that had you harmed a hair of Shirley's head—I—"

"So that's it!" screeched the now infuriated Florine. "You love her—that scheming little fraud!"

"Love her—I worship her!" Trent's voice rang with his emotion.

Florine glared her rage. "You silly fool—I might have known—you've always been a fizzle as a lover—but already I've evened up things—you're married to a woman who hates you, and I made the match, do you hear! Bah, go on and take your graveyard wife, for all I care!" And with a scornful lift of her shoulders, Florine swept out of the room.

Huddled in her chair, Shirley had made no sound as she watched and listened, but as her husband came toward her she rose, her face illumined with happiness. Trent didn't wish her to die at all! He loved her!

"I'm sorry, Shirley—I hadn't meant you to know, but I shall free you now—" The man's voice was not quite steady as he spoke. Suddenly a great light leaped into his eyes as they met those of the girl. "Shirley, my precious—Florine was wrong—you do care—darling—darling—say that you do!"

For answer Shirley's arms went about his neck as he caught her up and held her close, her lips lifted for the kiss he bent to give her.

CREDIT ACCOUNT

IF it should be
That you do not love me
Even as I love you, now and eternally:

Still I shall hold
More treasure than can be told—
For to be loved is silver, but to love is gold!

—*Lesley Grey*

He stood up, white with anger. "You do nothing but mock me," he said. "Good-by. I'm through!"

True Lovers' Night

By BARBARA BLISS

"I LOVE Hallowe'en," Barby remarked dreamily. "It's so sort of—of mystic and delicious. But just the same I wish Truda wouldn't put things like ghosts with skeleton false faces all over the house the night of the party. They—I know it's silly of me, but they scare me stiff. I can't get over feeling they may attract the real spirits who are supposed to be wandering around that night."

Danny Gregory laughed. It was, however, a tolerant laugh, and his gray eyes were tender as they rested upon Barby.

She was such a little thing and so very dear! Her hair was the color of buttercups; her eyes were so darkly brown that they were almost black; her nose was small and impertinent, and her mouth was, Dan felt sure, the most distracting feature ever fashioned.

What wonder, then, that she was a little spoiled?

"I don't think," she said now with reproving dignity, "that it's very nice of you to laugh at me."

"But, honey," Dan pointed out, "don't you know that if a self-respecting ghost strolled into your house on Hallowe'en, and saw the rude imitations of his kind that Truda had put up, he would stalk indignantly out again?"

"No, I don't know anything of the sort," said Barby coldly. "And I can't see why you keep telling me you love me all the time when you don't have any sympathy for my — for my *feelings.*"

"Oh, darling, I do have sympathy for you. You know I have. I just didn't think you could be serious. If you are, I'll laugh no more—particularly since you seem to consider it a reflection on my love." He added: "And, speaking of love—"

"But I don't want to speak of love," Barby hastily interposed. "You know I've told you so many times, Dan, that I simply won't consider being married or even engaged for ages and ages."

"Yes, I know," he agreed. "But when you're ready to be engaged—"

"I won't promise you anything."

"Not anything at all?" he asked, his gray eyes clouding wistfully.

"Not anything at all," was the conclusive response.

Dan sighed, looking speculatively at the girl beside him on the stone wall. They had been for a walk and now Barby, having decided to climb up here and rest for a few minutes, was playing idly with some red and gold leaves which had drifted down from the tree above them.

"But you love me," Danny said quietly.

The girl looked up and there was swift indignation in the movement.

"You haven't any right to say that," she retorted. "I don't love you. I don't love anybody—in that way. What's more, I'm not going to for a long time, and when I do, very probably it won't be you at all. For if I don't want to love you, you can't make me."

Danny's young mouth was stern now and his eyes were dark with pain.

"You are talking and acting just as usual, Barby—like a spoiled child," he told her. "And yet you aren't really a child, you know; you're nineteen—old enough, surely, to have some sense."

Barby, it appeared, was furious—so furious, in fact, that she could scarcely speak. Then:

"What do you *mean* by speaking to me like that, Danny Gregory? What do you *mean?*"

"Oh, there's no use getting mad about it," he informed her. "I made up my mind before we came out to-day that we would come to an understanding of some sort—"

"And so we have," Barby said ominously. "At least I hope *you* understand *me* when I tell you I never want to see you again as long as I live."

"Oh, yes, I understand," Dan assured her. "And if that's the way you feel it's perfectly all right with me. I'm tired, you see, of trailing around after you and having you fling in my face your complete indifference to me. I can't do it any more and keep my self-respect; so, if you don't want to admit that you love me and if you won't promise to marry me, I'm through."

"But why," she flashed, "should you talk to me about being through just after I've said I never want to see you again? You were through right then, when I told you about it, in case you don't know it!"

Again Danny looked at her with pain and speculation in his gray eyes.

"It was a crime to spoil as perfect a thing as you, dear," he said slowly. "But I presume that nothing can be done about it, now. You have heard, ever since you've been able to understand, what a beauty you are. And of

course we've all seen, for the last two years, how easily you've been twisting every man in sight around your little finger, me included. So the fact that you're spoiled isn't so strange, perhaps, as it is—heartbreaking. But, whatever way you look at it, the situation remains the same: You're having too good a time to give up your precious freedom and your gratified thirst for admiration, and I'm not willing to be an also-ran any longer. That brings us to a deadlock, doesn't it? So I—I think this had better be our good-by, dear."

BARBY, who was famous for her swift and endearing changes of mood, was regarding him now with an impish light in her brown eyes.

"Goodness!" she exclaimed. "What are you going to do, Danny? You're not contemplating suicide, are you?"

"Not for a minute."

"Then why this tragic farewell, since, if you're alive, you'll come to Truda's party to-morrow night?"

Through the mask of pain that had filmed his face Danny smiled.

"Oh, I'll be alive all right, but I shan't go to your sister's party," he asserted. "I wouldn't go if I were in town; but I shan't be here. I'm leaving Hartford—and I'm not coming back."

For just a moment Barby looked startled; then renewed confidence in her own power quickened the imp of mischief that danced within her.

"You are going away *forever?*" she asked, her voice at once tragic and mirth-inspired. "Oh, Dan, you've got your lines all balled up! Don't you know that 'Danny Boy' song better than this? You're supposed to say you're going, but will return as soon as ever you can—for in the song the girl says, 'It's you must go and I must bide; but come ye back when summer's in the meadow,' and so on. Then, a little later, she wails, 'Oh, Danny boy, I love you so!' And you can see for yourself that I can't come in with those lines unless you give me the right cue. So you're just spoiling the whole show."

"Yes," said Danny in a queer choked voice, "that, I presume, is all it means to you—some kind of show! You think I'm bluffing. Well"—he slipped from the wall and stood beside her—"time will prove that I mean just what I've said."

"It will," Barby agreeably acknowledged. "And time will also, I presume, mend my broken heart. Time's a great old pacifier."

"Don't you think you've laughed at me almost enough for one day?" Dan asked as she jumped from the wall and turned toward home.

"Well," she debated, "that depends upon how I feel to-night when you come over to help us decorate for the party. I may feel like teasing, and I may not. How can I tell?"

"But I'm not coming over to-night," he said quietly, turning to walk beside her.

Barby laughed up at him.

"You *are* cross, aren't you?" she teased.

Danny looked at her mutely, while his heart swelled with hunger and longing. How lovely she was in that close woolly tam o' shanter thing and that tweed suit! She made even the vivid reds and golds in the autumn foliage seem colorless. And he was going away from her forever! Well, it was the only thing to do: that was certain.

On they strolled, crushing the bright, crisp leaves beneath their feet, warily conscious of one another. Then:

"I suppose Paul Thomson will be glad enough to see me get out of town," Dan said moodily.

"Do you think so?" Barby asked with polite indifference.

"Yes, I do. And I suppose you'll—marry him one of these days. He has a lot of money."

"One never knows," Barby sagely observed.

As they reached the rather delightful, rambling old house in which she lived with her two sisters and a maiden aunt, Barby said blithely: "Good-by, Danny. See you at the party to-morrow night."

"Good-by," he returned, and this time he did not even try to convince her that he never intended to see her again.

Barby ran up the veranda steps, and entered the house with a little song on her lips.

How silly Dan was to make such a fuss about nothing, she mused. If she wasn't yet ready to be engaged, there was certainly no reason why she should be. And the very idea of his pretending he would give her up, and go away from Hartford! How *could* he expect her to believe anything so absurd as that? Why, he'd be over to-night to help them decorate for the party. Nothing could keep him away.

BUT something did keep Dan away that night. And that something, Barby decided, was a stubborn determination to make good his own words. He had said he was not coming, and so he just wouldn't come. But of course he would not stay away long. No longer, in fact, than to-morrow night, when he would surely come to Truda's party.

So Barby gayly assisted the others to decorate the old house for Hallowe'en. And most thoroughly it was decorated, even the cellar, which was to be used for some of the more eerie games.

Truda, who was two years older than Barby, professed to be highly delighted with that cellar, for there they had constructed a most truly gruesome ghost. It was much more realistic than the one they had put by the fireplace in the dining room, and it was far more horrible than the one they had placed in a corner of the living room.

Barby detested that cellar ghost. It made her creep even to glance in its direction, but not for worlds would she have admitted this to any one present. Only to Danny would one have confessed such pitiable weakness. And that, she reasoned, was understandable. Danny loved her so much that he wouldn't look down on her even if he did know she was a coward.

But when Dorothy, Barby's and Truda's younger sister, crept out of bed and down into the cellar to see what all the noise and laughter was about, it seemed that more than one member of the Bradford family found that choice ghost disturbing.

There were about ten young people in the cellar and they were standing far enough away from the ghost they had just erected to see it at best advantage.

"I think I find him so alluring because of his breadth of shoulders," Truda decided. "That was an awfully clever idea of yours, Jack—tying pillows around that curtain pole and then draping the sheet over it, I mean. No ghost should look too shapeless, and I'm afraid the others do."

Jack Bassett, to whom Truda was engaged to be married, placed a proprietary arm around her.

"Never mind the others, Truda," he advised. "One perfect ghost is enough for any Hallowe'en party. And I like

this chap because his skeleton mask is so sinister."

It was just then that Dorothy came creeping down the cellar steps in her pyjamas and small bedroom slippers. Dorothy saw the ghost, shrieked.

Afterward all the boys in the cellar declared that it was only the girls who had jumped and cried out—and it was quite true that only the girls cried out.

When Truda discovered her small sister cowering in terror upon the cellar stairs she was both indignant and sympathetic.

"Oh, you bad little thing!" she exclaimed, out of the immensity of her relief. "What do you mean by coming down here and scaring us all to death? Aunt Alicia put you to bed ages ago. But there, dear, don't cry. That's only a make-believe ghost."

"'Tain't!" Dorothy sobbed. "It's a real live one and it's got a bony face what's all fierce and mad an—"

"Nonsense!" Truda said briskly. "We made it ourselves out of a curtain pole and sheets and things. And that's nothing but a false face on top of it. I never did suppose you'd be such a baby."

"I'm not a baby, I'm just scared," Dorothy objected. "And I want Barby."

Barby went to her, then.

"I'll take her up to bed," she said obligingly. "I'm awfully tired, anyway. You people won't mind, will you, if I don't help put up the pumpkins and things?"

"Of course we won't mind," Truda assured her. "Run along, honey, if you're tired. I know you had a long walk this afternoon. But for goodness sake don't let that youngster come rambling down here again."

"I won't," Barby promised, urging her sister up the stairs.

When they had almost reached the top, Barby heard Cicely Carter remark, "Why isn't Danny here tonight, Truda? I thought you said he never missed an opportunity to be with Barby."

"So I did," Truda asserted, "and it's perfectly true. Anybody with eyes could see how crazy Dan is about Barby. It's just that he—"

Barby closed the door, then, at the top of the cellar steps, and led Dorothy across the kitchen and up the stairs.

What a little cat Cicely Carter was! she reflected. And everybody knew Cicely was crazy about Dan. Well—a glint of determination shone in Barby's soft brown eyes—she would show Cicely to-morrow night just whom Danny belonged to—for of course Danny would come to the party to-morrow night, no matter how much he had sworn to keep away.

Somehow Barby had not had as much fun to-night as she had expected to have. Truda gave a Hallowe'en party every year, and always before Barby had loved helping her get ready for them. But, for some reason, this entire evening had been strangely flat. To-morrow night, though, she concluded, everything would be different.

"Why didn't Danny come over tonight?" Dorothy asked, leaning sleepily against her sister. She added, "I love Danny. I'm gonna marry him some day when I get ready."

Barby started. It was almost as though the drowsy child at her side had voiced an intention which lurked, unexpressed in her own mind.

THE following day seemed to Barby to be both long and tiresome. She was oddly restless and she found herself waiting almost breathlessly for the telephone. When-

ever it rang she flew to answer it; but none of the calls—which were from everybody in town but Danny—appeared to satisfy her.

His arms closed about her, and he was not a ghost—he was real!

At last, however, it was time to dress for the party. It was Hallowe'en! Barby stood by the window and looked out into the impenetrable velvet darkness, trying to recapture some of the charm which the night had always held for her.

A pale, cold moon swept out from under a cloud and seemed to flood the earth with the mystery and mysticism which has gone into the making of Hallowe'en.

And the wind answered the call of the moon. It swept suddenly across her window, crying its eerie promise to bear safely that night the witches who must fly on their broomsticks up

through the clouds and over that pale, cold light.

For everybody knows that, unless the wind is wild and strong, no luck will come to the lands which are lighted by the moon on Hallowe'en, for the wind must carry safely over that moon every witch who rides her broomstick.

And this, Barby remembered, was the night when black cats come into their own. For what, on Hallowe'en, was a mere Persian or an Angora cat? They were nothing but insignificant relations of the black monarchs with arched backs and long spiral tails who this night ruled their race.

But the departed spirits? Was it true that they were free to-night to roam the earth? Was it true that their voices could be heard crying through the wind? Could the stories people told be *all* imagination?

Shivering a little, but managing to smile at her own absurdities, Barby drew back from the window, and started to dress.

She had a new frock for the party and she loved it. It was chiffon with a ruffled skirt that just cleared the floor, and it was the color of daffodils. Barby was one of those blondes who look flowerlike in yellow.

Danny would like this frock, she decided happily when at last she was ready.

Just then Dorothy rapped upon her door, and came into the room without waiting for an invitation.

"I've got something for you," the child announced. "It's a letter. Danny gave it to me this morning when I was playing out front, but I forgot all about it. Anyway, I remembered now—so here 'tis." She handed her sister a somewhat rumpled envelope, adding, "It got all mussed up in my pocket."

With fingers suddenly cold and tremulous, Barby tore open the letter. What could Danny be writing her about when he was coming—oh, surely he was coming over to-night?

Then she read:

MY DARLING:

I can't go away without trying once more to make you understand how much I love you. And yet, if you won't love me, if you won't promise to marry me, I must go.

The firm has offered to send me to California on business, and if I make good it should mean a substantial increase in salary. I meant to tell you this yesterday and to ask you to marry me at once and go with me, but I couldn't—not after you started to laugh at me.

But, oh, darling, can't you love me? Can't you come with me? I could wait a week for you to get ready—but if you won't come, I am going away at once. I will leave this afternoon and I won't come back, dear. If you don't want me, there will be nothing to bring me.

I'll wait, dear, until the last minute to hear from you. If you love me, even a little, call me up and I'll come to talk things over. But if I don't hear from you before five I'll know there's no use hoping, and I'll leave on the five eleven train.

But, my darling, I love you so much. No man on earth could ever love you more. Always,

DANNY.

Barby looked up from the letter, her eyes glazed, unseeing, her heart beating suffocatingly through her suddenly chilled body.

Danny had gone away—forever! This letter said that he would leave on the 5:11 train—and it was now eight o'clock!

He had been gone for hours. She could not reach him. She could never reach him again!

A low cry broke from her lips. "Oh,

Dorothy, why didn't you give me this letter before? Why *didn't* you?"

"I forgotted—I just forgotted," said Dorothy placidly. She added, "And there's no use looking all wild about it. I've gived it to you now."

With despair in her eyes, Barby looked down at her small sister. She was so little, so innocent—and yet she had ruined two lives!

But was there a chance—oh, just a tiny chance—that Danny had not, after all, taken that five o'clock train?

Barby darted across the room, and downstairs to the telephone. There she called the house where Dan boarded, only to learn from one of the maids that Mr. Gregory was not there.

"But has he left for good?" Barby questioned her. "Or has he just gone out?"

"I think he's gone for good, miss," the maid returned. "I heard he was leaving for California to-day, and his room's all tore up."

"Can't you ask your mistress?" Barby quavered. "Can't you make sure? It's—it's very important."

"Mrs. Parsons ain't home, but I heard her say Mr. Gregory was leaving; and he ain't here; neither is his luggage. He's gone all right."

A FEELING of complete desolation swept over Barby. She replaced the receiver and turned slowly away from the telephone.

"Oh, it serves me right!" she thought. "Deep down in my heart I've always known that I loved Danny; but I was having such a good time that I—wouldn't let myself admit it. And now he's gone. I'll never see him again—never as long as I live!"

The sound of laughter came from the living room. Who was there? She wondered vaguely, and then remembered: The party! People were beginning to arrive. She would have to go into the living room and laugh and talk and play games. But how *could* she? Oh, how could she *possibly* do that?

Then some one came out into the hall. It was Paul Thomson, of whom Danny had been jealous only yesterday.

"Hello there, Beautiful!" he greeted her. "I've been wondering where you were. No party is a party to me without you, so come and join the racket."

Barby allowed herself to be led into the living room, into the glow of candlelight which flickered through grotesque-faced pumpkin shades, into the symbolic gayety of all Hallowe'en.

And somehow she managed to laugh and talk, even though a cold, frightening weight seemed to have taken the place of her heart. Of one thing she was certain: she must not think of Danny.

When it came time for the girls to go down the cellar steps backward, holding a lighted candle and a mirror before them in an attempt to see their future husbands reflected in the mirror, Barby managed to beg off. It made her dizzy, she protested, to go down steps backward. But the truth was, she simply could not play that game.

"I believe you're like Dorothy—afraid of that ghost down in the cellar," Jack teased her.

"Or perhaps," Cicely Carter suggested sweetly, "she's afraid of what she might not see in the mirror. And that reminds me, Barby, why isn't Dan here to-night? I thought he would be."

"So did I," said Barby, meeting squarely the eyes of her tormentor. "But as you see, he just isn't here. I hope you're not disappointed."

Cicely laughed, and it was not a pleasant laugh.

"Why should *I* be disappointed?" she asked. "This isn't my party."

"No," said Truda warningly, "it's mine. And we're supposed to be playing a game. But if Barby doesn't want to play it there's no reason why any one should try to make her. Now then: Who goes next?"

It was later in the evening when some one asked Hazel Bassett, Jack's sister, to sing.

"Sing 'Danny Boy,'" one of the girls urged her. "That's so exactly right for your voice, and I do love it."

Barby drew back into the shadow of the window. They wanted Hazel to sing "Danny Boy"—the very song that she, herself, had burlesqued yesterday to Danny Gregory! Could she, Barby wondered, leave the room without any one noticing? But no, she couldn't. Cicely would be sure to notice and to suspect why Hazel's song could not be endured—

Then in her low, clear voice Hazel began to sing:

"Oh, Danny boy, the pipes, the pipes are calling,
From glen to glen and down the mountainside,
The summer's gone, and all the roses falling,
It's you, it's you must go, and I must bide;
But come ye back when summer's in the meadow,
Or when the valley's hushed and white with snow,
It's I'll be here in sunshine or in shadow—
Oh, Danny boy, oh, Danny boy, I love you so!"

Barby was trembling now, and the lump which had come into her throat was choking her. Blindly she turned and crept quietly out into the hall.

She would go up to her room, she decided. She was going to cry, and she couldn't do it here!

But two of the guests, a girl and a man, were seated on one of the lower steps of the stairs, engaged in a most confidential discussion. It would not do, Barby decided, to go past them. They would speak to her and—well, she couldn't answer. She couldn't talk just now to any one.

Hurriedly she made her way out into the dining room, and from there to the kitchen. She would, she suddenly determined, go down cellar. There, at least, she could be alone for a few minutes; no one would disturb her, for the others would not go down again. They had played all the games they intended to play there.

IN the kitchen she found her Aunt Alicia, and Molly, the maid, preparing the Hallowe'en supper; but fortunately both had their backs to her. Barby was able, therefore, to gain the cellar doorway on tiptoe, and to pass through it without attracting their attention. Still moving as silently as possible, she went down the cellar stairs.

It was very dark down there—blessedly dark and quiet, it seemed to Barby. There were only patches of light made by the moon as it streamed through the small, high windows. She sat quietly down upon the bottom step and let the tears have their way. Thickly they poured down her cheeks, dropping upon the daffodil frock which she had thought Danny would like.

Danny! Hazel's song . . . "Oh, Danny boy, oh, Danny boy, I love you so!"

Then, "I can't bear it," she thought incoherently. "Oh, I *can't!* Never to see Danny again—"

Quite suddenly Barby sat erect, her thoughts scattered by something altogether unexpected. She had heard a sound. And it had not come from the kitchen nor from anywhere else above. Something had moved right there in the cellar!

A mouse, perhaps? But, no, they never had mice. Their cat kept them away—always.

But then who—*what* was it?

It was just at that moment Barby remembered the ghost, that somehow horrible ghost which Jack had fashioned down there last night. In her desire to be alone, she had quite forgotten it.

Oh, why had she come here? Why had she *ever* come? She was afraid to look toward the spot where the ghost was standing, and she was afraid to dash back up the stairs.

Slowly she turned her head. She *must* look. It was the only thing to do. She must, must look.

And then she did.

Barby's lips parted soundlessly. It seemed to her that she stopped breathing. She was looking directly at the place where Jack had erected the ghost. Moonlight from one of the windows was flooding that part of the cellar. *But the ghost was not there!*

Barby sprang to her feet, and simultaneously she heard again the sound which had startled her. It came from the other side of the cellar. Almost against her will she turned in its direction. And then a low, muffled cry broke from her white lips.

There, leaning against the wall, apparently looking through one of the cellar windows, stood a tall figure robed in white.

And it had heard Barby's almost breathless cry—for it was turning round, coming toward her!

She tried to scream, to turn and dash up the stairs, but she could only stand there as though horror had frozen her to the spot.

The ghost—the ghost that had moved and was still moving—it was coming nearer, nearer—

Then Barby thought that she must be going mad, for a voice she had thought never to hear again spoke swiftly, contritely:

"Oh, my dear, I forgot I was still wearing this idiotic sheet! Have I frightened you?"

The next thing she knew the ghost had torn off his flowing robes of white, and there before her stood Danny Gregory!

"I couldn't go without seeing you again," he began incoherently, "but I didn't want you to know I was here. I thought I'd just see you once more, and then go away, so you could never suspect I'd been here. At first I couldn't think of any place where I might hide safely and yet be sure to see you; then I remembered the cellar and the ghosts Truda always has down here Hallowe'en. I knew I could get through one of the cellar windows, take out the framework under the ghost, and conceal myself behind that sheet and false face. It seemed a perfect hiding place, for I knew you always came down here to play some of the games—but to-night you didn't come down with the others, Barby. I was just wondering what to do when I heard you cry out behind me."

"I was so frightened," said Barby in a small, tremulous voice. "Oh, I was terribly frightened, Danny! I—I thought you were the ghost—"

Then she walked straight over to him, crept into his arms, and began to cry as though her heart would break.

And Danny, being a mere man, had

not the faintest suspicion that she was crying because she was too happy to do anything else.

"Darling heart!" he said huskily. "Oh, Barby, to think of my frightening you like this! I'm a half-wit brute! But when I saw you here, sweetheart, I forgot all about that fool sheet I had around me. I knew only that I must speak to you and that I didn't care if you did know I was here. Don't cry, love—please don't. I'll never forgive myself."

"But you d-don't understand," Barby sobbed. "I'm crying because I'm so g-glad you're here, Danny. You see, I didn't get your letter in time to call you up. Dorothy forgot to give it to me until eight o'clock. Then I telephoned your boarding house, and they told me you had left, luggage and all."

"So I had, dear. I got as far as the station, and then decided I couldn't go away without one last look at you. But, darling, do you mean to say you were going to tell me—not to go away?"

"Oh, yes—yes, I was, Danny! I—well, I love you—just terribly. I think I have for a long time, but I wouldn't admit it even to myself. I was so determined to be free and just have a good time. But to-night, when I thought I'd never see you again, I knew I couldn't have any sort of good time away from you, Danny. I knew that you were—just all I'd ever want."

DANNY'S arms were holding her very close now. He bent his head, and crushed beneath his own the lips that had for so long both haunted and teased him.

"I've always heard that strange things could occur on Hallowe'en," he marveled, "but I never supposed that even then miracles could happen. Do you mean that you'll marry me, sweetheart, and come to California with me next week?"

"If you'll—wait for me," she promised. "If you won't go away to-night or to-morrow."

"I couldn't leave you now," he vowed, "if you told me to go."

"Then that's all right," said Barby, sighing happily and resting her head against his shoulder. "For I'll never tell you to go away from me even for one little minute. I'm going to show you now how sorry I am I've been so bad to you. I'm going to love you and love you and love you. Oh"—she tightened her arms about him—"it's so wonderful to have you back again! I was so unhappy when I thought you'd gone away. I came down here to be alone and—cry."

"Barby!" Truda called from above. "Barby, where are you?"

"We'll both go up, now," Barby whispered hurriedly. "But we won't tell them you've been hiding down here in the ghost. We'll say you came in the side door and I brought you down here to—to see the decorations." Then, in clear, confident tones she called, I'm coming, Truda. Danny and I are both coming."

"How wonderful that sounds!" Dan murmured close to her lips. "Danny and I! It will always be that way now, won't it, sweetheart?"

"Always," Barby agreed, "except when *you're* talking about us. Then you'll have to say 'Barby and I'—won't you like that?"

"Won't I love it!" Danny exulted, covering her radiant little face with kisses. Then he asked, "But must we really go upstairs?"

"Of course we must. I want to tell everybody — particularly Cicely

Carter—that we're going to be married —and then we must have supper."

"But of what importance is Cicely Carter? And what do I want with supper up there when I can kiss you down here?"

"You can," Barby pointed out, "kiss me all the rest of your life."

"Gosh!" said Danny, and managed somehow to make the exclamation sound amazingly reverent. "I'm the luckiest chap on earth!"

"And I'm the luckiest girl," Barby vowed in blissful confirmation of his statement. Then she added, "I've just thought of something, dear: No luck is supposed to come to a land that is lighted by moonlight on Hallowe'en, you know, unless all the witches can fly high enough on their broomsticks to sail over the moon. And, oh, if that's true, Danny, every witch who rode her broomstick must have gone over that moon to-night!"

GIFT

IT'S taking all your self control,
I seem to hear you say;
I know it; that is why I lean
This tantalizing way.

Here are my lips, no longer proud,
My eyes, no longer gay;
It's taking all your self control—
But—you can turn away!

Oh, if you really loved, my dear,
Shouldn't you know somehow
A kiss is all I need perhaps
To give me to you now?

—*Barbara Kaye*

"Warden," Nelsa said tensely, "I offer you a check for that amount if you will marry me!"

The Love Island

By MADELEINE SHARPS BUCHANAN

MOONLIGHT. Purple heavens, flecked here and there with gold, cupped above a purple sea, where the ripples stirred by the plunging nose of the liner Superba, America bound from Oriental ports, resembled creamy little ruffles. The moonlight was that liquid enchantment which floods the world at times lest the mystery of such beauty be utterly forgotten.

Kirk Brown, leaning against the open door of the salon, where the entertainment for the sailors' fund was in progress, glanced idly at the exquisite pliant body of the slim girl who danced on the impromptu stage. She was a well known vaudeville dancer, young and lovely, and people paid well for an opportunity to see her. Yet Brown regarded her indifferently, and Nelsa Trent, lying back in a chair beside him, flushed a trifle angrily.

"But Kirk, that's ridiculous!" She said. "No one would agree with you."

"He couldn't mean it on a night like this," sneered Rand Magill, "while he looks at Phillida yonder dancing!"

"Do you actually believe that a well bred man would not lose his head over a girl who is a beauty, but utterly and entirely out of his path of life, who is cheap, common, uneducated—if they were thrown together often or long enough?" asked Nelsa disgustedly, her exquisite little face taking on a haughty expression. "A man like you, for instance, and a girl like—that one

dancing yonder? She is a marvel to look at, but she is cheap and coarse and common."

"Yes, dear Nelsa, I actually believe that a truly well bred man would not lose his head over such a girl," repeated Brown amusedly. "This dancing Phillida would not attract him—anywhere."

"I'd like to see you tempted," laughed Magill, who considered Brown a snob.

"You never will," Kirk shrugged. "No woman out of my own circle, lacking caste, refinement, breeding, will ever have the faintest lure for me. Oh, I know that such things happen, but the man is not truly well bred when it does."

"Then I'm not well bred," laughed Magill. "For I frankly admit that if the girl is pretty enough, the moon bright enough and propinquity propinks, I'm finished. According to your argument, then, this little dancing loveliness should only be able to attract—say—your valet, Warden?"

"My valet, possibly," agreed Brown with a bend of his handsome head. "Yes, Warden might fall in love with Phillida, I should say. But Warden's employer—never."

NELSA TRENT looked out across the deck to the moonlit ocean. Her slim body, in its sheath of silvery evening gown, trembled slightly. Her lovely mutinous mouth was angrily firm, and her azure eyes, darkly fringed, held a strange expression.

Warden, the mystery man who served as Kirk Brown's valet, was by far the handsomest man on the liner, bar none. That his position as Brown's valet made it impossible for Nelsa to associate with him only lent a tang to his attraction for her.

For long silent days on the ocean, for long moonlit nights, Nelsa Trent had thought about Warden. She had tried to avoid him when, upon rare occasions, she had encountered him. Brown was given to entertaining in his suite, and at parties there, always properly chaperoned, the girl had been wildly conscious of the fascinating valet's presence. For Warden attended to everything, and seemed more the polished host than Brown himself, Brown with his snobbish ideas. How she would like to ruin some of them!

Sensations never roused before, dreams never dreamed, desires never guessed, were having their way with the beautiful society girl, heiress to millions that every man who met her coveted, as the liner sped on its way to American shores.

To look at Warden and regard him as a valet was impossible and ridiculous. It hurt, when it did not make her laugh, with a touch of bitterness. She whose family had come over in the Mayflower, who lived in one of the most exclusive homes in America, who had been courted by men ever since her coming out the year before, to feel that she would give it all up to know that a valet's arms were about her, his lips—perhaps—on hers!

"It is just this sea," she told herself, "and madness. I'll get over it when I reach home and plunge into the usual round."

Strange stories about Warden were being circulated. Which were true? Brown had picked him up, he said, some months before at Monte Carlo. He had been playing heavily and winning heavily. A man across the table, cleaned out of all his cash, had risen suddenly and the hand which had been pointed at Kirk Brown holding a gun had been grasped by Warden.

Brown had spoken to his rescuer, and from that hour Warden had become the valet, silent and unobtrusive, but with a subtle something in his narrowed eyes that Nelsa could not read.

He was a gentleman. There was no deceiving her about that. He far outshone Kirk Brown or any of the other men she knew. Brown with his snobbish talk of breeding!

"My tastes and yours differ, Magill," Brown was saying icily when Nelsa dragged her attention back to the men.

"Well, here comes one of mine," laughed Magill, as Phillida worked her graceful way down the aisle taking up the collection in a gayly ribboned tambourine.

"I am honest enough," added Magill lazily, "to admit that I find this little dancer simply luscious. If I found myself wrecked on an island with her I could manage to forget that my great aunt would probably object to my marrying her or that she could not quote Shakespeare."

Brown did not bother to reply. He dropped a bill into the girl's tambourine without a word or a smile, and Nelsa watched him with smoldering eyes. What he had said about Warden had infuriated her and disgusted her.

Phillida paused with a radiant smile beside Magill, who flung a handful of notes into the tambourine, the while he looked deep into her long lashed eyes.

She was a delicious looking creature; face and neck, arms and limbs she came close to being perfect. And there was a challenge in her walk and her every gesture one could not well miss.

WITH a slight movement of impatience, Nelsa rose and walked out to the deck, hurrying along until she found a secluded section where she had the rail to herself. Wretched thoughts tormented her and she could almost wish that the Superba might never dock. For when it did her parents would see to it that her engagement to Kirk Brown was announced immediately. She knew that. The two families had always been intimate, and all her life she had been brought up with the knowledge that some day she would be Kirk Brown's wife. Their friends took it for granted, and while she denied it it was common talk between those of her own circle. It made Nelsa feel trapped, suffocated.

No one knew a great deal about Kirk. He traveled incessantly and only came home long enough to remind Nelsa, growing into a glorious young womanhood, that she was eventually to be his. That she would never marry him Nelsa knew, but just then she did not see a way out. While she was aware that the man she could love was Kirk Brown's valet!

The night was changing a trifle. For the moment, wrapped in her summer furs, Nelsa had that part of the deck to herself, and, immersed in her own troubles, she was not at first aware of the subtle stillness and tenseness in the atmosphere, of the little waves that now and then ran up and slapped the sides of the ship, of the salt spray that occasionally whipped past her cool cheek.

A step at her side and a hand on her bare arm roused her with a start. Brown was bending over her, his burning eyes on hers.

"Nelsa, the captain says we are running into a typhoon," he said in a subdued, excited voice. "Typhoons are mighty dangerous things. No use evading the fact that the ship will be in serious danger. I intend to keep you at my side until it is over."

Nelsa lifted her head haughtily.

"Kirk, this arrangement our families made for us long ago is ridiculous," she said quietly. "We are living in a modern age where girls pick out their own husbands. We do not love each other. It is best that we understand that when we dock this flimsy betrothal of ours is ended."

Brown's face darkened and he laid two forceful hands on the girl's shoulders, turning her cold little face to his. As he did so the moon slipped behind a cloud and the Superba seemingly climbed an enormous wave and slithered down its other side. Nelsa, willing or not, was flung into the arms of the man she was trying to repulse, and he made the best of the situation by folding them closely about her slender pliant body.

"Nelsa, you are mine as you have always been," he said passionately. "This is no time to sever any old ties. We may be at the bottom of the sea in an hour. Listen!"

Through the sound of the distant music in the ballroom, through the romantic silence of the night, there now came strange sounds. Hatches being clamped down, boat lashings tested, chairs smacked together and removed from deck, the hurried passing of many feet above, below—all around them. A chill, penetrating air began to make itself felt and the ship rose on another more prolonged swell.

"The captain refused to listen to me," Brown was saying as Nelsa struggled to free herself, "but I found a minister in the second cabin—a nice chap who was touched by my story and has consented to marry us at once. His name is Dorcas, and he's waiting for us now with a couple of witnesses. Nelsa, all my life I have yearned for this moment. I do not intend to go out of life without knowing that you are my wife. Come with me now. I adore you—I always have! We are in serious danger, Nelsa. Give yourself to me before we face it!"

"Kirk, you have had too many cocktails," said Nelsa in a cold rage, her two small hands pressed against his breast. "Let me go at once. I do not intend ever to marry you. You have lost your head completely to-night. What would I marry you like this for, simply because there is a storm coming up at sea? Let me go!"

For answer Brown, losing control of himself utterly because of having held her loveliness so long in his arms, swept her closer to him, forced her face up and bent his lips to hers.

AND then, so quickly that she scarcely realized what had happened, some one seized Brown by the back of his coat and, sending him staggering back from Nelsa, dealt him a vicious blow on the chin.

In a daze Nelsa, shivering in her fluffy furs, saw that it was Warden who had come to her aid and laid daring hands upon his fastidious employer!

Something primitive swept the girl then. She flung out jeweled hands toward the man she so strangely loved.

"Couldn't you—thrash him?" she begged.

Warden glanced toward the inert form of Brown with a fascinating grin.

"I could," he said, "but it's a rather warm night!"

For a magic moment the man and girl stood regarding each other. Both felt the unseen danger in the air. The coming storm, the preparations going on all over the ship, the orchestra playing bravely in the ballroom, the fact that this exquisite girl was engaged to

marry the brute on the deck! All seemed for the magic moment to sweep down barriers and conquer common sense.

"Typhoon coming," said Warden then briefly. "Soon we shall be battened down. You have nerve."

"Why do you think I have?" asked Nelsa breathlessly, her starry eyes on his.

"Because you are going to marry that swine," said Warden with a contemptuous glance toward Brown, who still lay where he had fallen.

Nelsa had nerve. She was not at all afraid, and a feeling of exhilaration was taking possession of her. Suppose they never survived this coming storm! She had heard enough about typhoons. For one glorious moment she had seen Warden step out of his rôle as Brown's valet when he snatched her from his employer's arms. There was mystery about Warden. But he might slip back into that rôle when this wonderful night was past and she would lose him—lose her chance at love!

"Warden," she said quietly while the chill wind blew her froth of fair curls about and she clung to the rail as the ship lifted again, "Kirk says he will never give me up, and I believe him. I hate him. Our families have held marriage with him over my head ever since I can remember. I'd do anything to escape! He just told me he had a minister waiting in the second cabin to marry us. If you will come with me and marry me yourself, I will give you a check for twenty-five thousand dollars and my word that you will be freed the moment I have done with Kirk Brown forever. If this ship goes down—well, none of it will matter."

"You realize what you are saying?" asked Warden slowly. "You, the beauty, the heiress, the exclusive Miss Trent, are asking me, a valet, a paid servant, to marry you?"

"Nonsense," said Nelsa with a little short laugh. "You are above all else a gentleman. Keep your secret if you wish. Will you do this for me? All my life I have been afraid of Kirk Brown, although I've hidden it."

She waited with shaking nerves for his reply, all the while loving him more. If he refused! If, their paths having closely touched during this one instant of peril, he drifted away from her, out of her life! If he guessed that she cared for him!

The linen-clad figure of an officer came down the deck toward them, but not close enough to discern the sprawled form of Brown in the corner.

"All inside, please," he said curtly. "We are clearing the decks."

It was the one thing needed. The danger was real! To Nelsa nothing could have been more beautiful than the thought of going out of life as the wife of this man, whom she loved, but whom convention would have kept from her. Her beautiful eyes shone and her soft lips parted. A spoiled, headstrong little beauty, reared in the lap of luxury, she had always had whatever she desired from life. In the face of death she snatched for it!

The ship flung her toward Warden, and he put out a strong arm and slipped it about her. His handsome eyes, as she looked up into them, were shining with a strange light.

With his lips close to her ear in the rising gale, "What was the name of this minister Brown had waiting in the second cabin?" he asked.

HALF an hour later, a mere breath of time during that hectic night, Nelsa stood inside her suite, the check she had offered to Warden, and

which he had curtly refused, in her shaking fingers. She was his bride.

She had married the man she loved in a stuffy little second cabin while the great ship rolled and pitched in an appalling sea—she whose wedding to Kirkland Brown was to have been newspaper talk for the country!

His name was really Warden Lansing. He had told the minister quite simply as that small, pale person stammered over the beautiful service, and two fellow passengers, called upon haphazard, stood by as witnesses.

She was Mrs. Warden Lansing. It was not believable.

Mechanically she took from her finger Warden's heavy seal ring and strung it upon the platinum chain that supported an exquisite pear-shaped diamond about her white throat. She knew nothing of the man she had asked to marry her, nothing save that he was the one man in the world, and that therefore he must be all that she desired him to be.

If the ship drove on into serious danger he had promised to come for her. What daylight and sanity would do for them she had no idea. This was the one night of her life! She had never lived before.

As she got out of her evening gown and into stout warm clothing, as he had bade her do, slipping on a heavy coat and placing her jewels and money in the small suède bag she carried in her bosom when she traveled, she did not seem like herself at all. Her world of country clubs, operas, millionaires and mansions seemed like a dream and very far-away. She was alone upon a tossing sea, in deadly danger, with the man she had reached out for and claimed as her own

How would he deal with this situation when the ship docked and she was met by her family and enthusiastic friends, and by reporters waiting to see her come ashore with Kirk Brown? Warden did not seem like a young man to be hurried into a heedless marriage. His quick assent was as mysterious as everything else about him.

Her maid had deserted her, and was probably huddled in panic somewhere with the other maids. Nelsa was alone when, the moment she had completed her preparations, the grinding crash came, the terrible rending sound. The ship seemed to lift from the water, dropping from an impossible height for endless æons.

Clinging to the couch, Nelsa was nevertheless flung upon the floor, which was tilted at a dreadful angle. After a moment, dazed, but holding fast to her senses, determined not to faint with panic, she dragged herself to her feet and slipped and slid down the slanting corridor toward the door which opened on deck.

She knew that the worst must have happened. Nothing was going to matter after all. That wild unnatural ceremony she and Warden had gone through together, her love for him—nothing mattered.

The door onto the deck now swung open and it seemed that the ship had listed the other way, for Nelsa had to creep as though up a wall to the steps which led to deck. The world was pandemonium when she reached there, filled with cries, crashes, the roar of the waves, the scream of the gale. A chair came sliding toward her, and suddenly the floor which she had gained after such a struggle gave way beneath her feet and an avalanche of water rushed down upon her.

Putting out her hands, Nelsa screamed at the top of her voice: "Warden! Warden!" and then the

storm-tossed world went out as the mountainous waves engulfed her.

NELSA came to herself with the faint consciousness of being in a small restless space which tossed her cruelly about; of being very wet and of getting wetter at intervals; of rain in her face. Her mouth was full of salt and her left wrist hurt. Gradually her senses returned. She was sound. But where was she?

Turning her head slightly, with vast effort, she saw that she was in a boat, and that Warden was seated near her, rowing. There were other people in the boat, and that was all that Nelsa knew until she wakened, fully herself, before a roaring fire.

Sitting up abruptly she looked into the face of Phillida, the dancer. The girl was kneeling beside her throwing more wood upon the fire which burned brightly in this sheltered spot not far from the crash of the waves.

"Hello!" said Phillida, brightly. "You sure were knocked out. How do you feel?"

"All right," replied Nelsa a trifle dazedly. "What happened?"

"Oh, I guess the good old ship has gone to the bottom," shrugged the dancer carelessly. "And so would we if it hadn't been for Mr. Brown's valet—Warden, he says his name is. Got us all into a boat at the last minute

"Do you forget that I am—your wife?"

and—here we are. Only no one knows where here is."

Nelsa was shaken by horror. She felt weak and ill. But vaguely she took in the exquisite body of the dancing girl as she bent near the fire. Phillida had no cloak, and her thin evening gown clung to every line of her lovely form. It seemed years ago that Kirk Brown had said he could never be attracted to a girl like this.

Putting out a swift hand, Nelsa laid it on Phillida's bare arm.

"Where is Warden?" she asked.

"Over there with the other men," said Phillida. "They are arranging some sort of flare, I believe. They say this is an island. But even if it is, a bunch of people can't exist on it long. We have no water and no food. Boats are supposed to be stocked, but ours wasn't. That's often the way."

Nelsa shivered. She touched the water-soaked garment she wore over her gown and started to find that it was not the heavy cloak she had donned in her stateroom.

"You gave me you coat, Phillida," she accused, something in the glance the girl gave her in the firelight telling her the truth.

"Oh, shucks!" shrugged the little dancer. "I'm used to knocking about. I can stand a lot of things. You can't. Warden said you must have lost your coat and so I—well, I just wrapped you in mine, that's all. You're society, you know, and all that. I'm just 'coarse and cheap and common,' out of your class, Miss Trent."

Nelsa swept the cloak from about her shoulders.

"Phillida, what do you mean?" she asked, her face flushing. "Please take your coat. I am quite comfortable now. My frock is heavy."

"Mr. Magill told me what you said, and what that snob Brown said last night while I was dancing." Phillida's rich lip curled. "I wanted to ask you if you're going to marry Brown?"

"No!" cried Nelsa with an hysterical little laugh. "Oh, no, Phillida, I am *not!* We were unkind, ignorant, narrow. Please forgive us."

"Oh, sure," shrugged Phillida, shivering a little. "I just want to show that snob Kirk Brown, that's all."

"Is he—here on the island?" breathed Nelsa.

For a moment she had hoped that she would never need to see the man again. He might have got away in another boat.

"I'll say he's here!" sniffed Phillida. "Warden flung him into our boat like a sack, along with a funny little guy who says he is a minister and a lot of other people. There must be ten of us here. I have Magill to thank for my life being saved, I guess. We were sitting on deck when it happened, hiding around a corner we thought was sheltered after we were warned inside. That's why I hadn't a thing with me except this thin evening gown."

Nelsa was silent for a moment. She was staring across the huge fire at figures which moved dimly beyond. The storm had ceased, but the wind was chill against their soaked clothing, and not far off high waves pounded upon a beach.

Warden had flung Brown into the boat along with the minister who had married them. *Why?* Why would a man like Warden look after a man like Brown and a stranger like the minister in the second cabin?

Nelsa stood up. The desire to see her bridegroom was overpowering. Phillida, hugging her knees beside the fire, watched her with brilliant eyes.

"On this island I guess we're all just folks," she said softly. "I'm going to show that snob Brown. He doesn't know anything about life. And neither do you. I'm twice the woman you are here, Miss Trent, and Warden is twice the man that guy who employs him is."

Nelsa did not reply. Stumbling, she made her way past the fire, past the few people who huddled beside it, women and men, and along the sodden sand toward the place where she could see a group of men, hear voices.

Since she had left the salon of the Superba and leaned upon its rail everything had become unreal. As the little dancer had said, they were just folks now. Perhaps destined to die there together!

WARDEN left the group of men and strode toward her immediately. He was, she saw, without a coat, and the sleeves of his white shirt were in tatters. If he had had a coat she would have had it, she knew with a happy little thrill!

"Are you quite all right?" asked Warden, looking closely into her white face.

"Yes," said Nelsa gravely. "Thanks to you. It *was* you who found me, was it not?"

"Of course," he said a bit impatiently. "This is a pretty fix, isn't it? A bit of luck for me, perhaps—but for you—"

"Luck?" Her lips opened softly and she looked up at him in amazement.

"Get back to the fire," he said curtly. "You will be ill. I'm afraid you've taken cold. We can't do much until morning."

As they stood there together, Nelsa felt again the uncivilized feeling sweep over her. If they might stay on that island for a while! Others had managed to survive. If she could be wrecked there for a time with Warden until she had won his love, until the strange situation had worked its magic with them! She was his bride, and yet—there was a singularly unstable feeling about that.

"Phillida said that Brown and Magill and the minister were all in your boat," she ventured.

"Yes." He turned from her, his lips set grimly. "We were almost the last to push off. For a moment it was touch and go. I was looking for you. You did not stay in your cabin as I asked you to. But Brown and the minister—well, I had to have them."

"You had to have them!" repeated Nelsa wonderingly.

"Get back to the fire," Warden repeated sharply. "We are setting a flare on top of that hill. That's all we can do to-night. There was a cask of water in the boat. I've buried it. Nobody else knew it was there. We shall need that more than food if the worst comes to the worst."

He turned abruptly and left her, and Nelsa stole back to the warming glow of the big fire. Her hand was pressing the heavy seal ring against her soft flesh; a sudden contempt for herself was searing her very soul.

Why should she care so much for this man? She, Nelsa Trent, one of the prizes of American society? Had she forgotten her breeding, her background, her position during those mad days and nights at sea? She had *married* this man—her promised husband's valet! But her pride was fainter than her passion for him.

She loved him!

A step close beside her caused her to shrink back into the shadows. Kirk Brown was striding toward the fire. He was looking for her! She could

not face him then, could not precipitate a scene in such a place and at such a time.

But—Brown was not seeking her. His step went on until he reached the huddled figure of the little dancer, close to the blaze. As he bent above Phillida the watching girl heard his words:

"I've been looking for you. You held my head in your arms in the boat after that brute Warden knocked me out—didn't you?"

She could see Phillida's alluring little face lifted close to Brown's, see the firelight in her wonderful eyes.

"Why, yes," said the dancer's voice, now soft and seductive. "I've been watching you for days on board. I couldn't pass up a chance like that when fate handed it to me."

Warden had knocked Brown out. *For the second time?* That first blow after he had tried to kiss her, just before their insane marriage, would not have been enough, surely, to have kept Brown unconscious so long. And Phillida had said that Warden flung the society man into the boat "like a sack" along with the minister.

And had not Warden said this was a bit of luck for him, and that he had had to have the minister and Brown?

Brown stooped low over Phillida now, drew her up close to him, close in the firelight. Nelsa could see the dancer's back-flung head, the lure of her little heart-shaped face, the call in her eyes. And she knew that Phillida was playing a part. That she was "showing" that snob Brown.

As she watched, shivering on the edge of the fire, she knew how wrong Kirk had been. Why, the girl could do anything with him!

"You little beauty," Brown was saying, very low, in a tone he had often used to Nelsa.

But Phillida flung up a hand and laid its pink barrier between his lips and hers.

"Not yet," she laughed softly. "Let's sit here by the fire a while."

NELSA, feeling sick but elated, crept farther away and sank down by herself. She did not know who else had been in the boat with them. There were dim forms of women across from her, but she did not investigate.

Her thoughts went back to her love for Warden and the problem of their marriage. She had never seen anything but courteous indifference in his manner to her. She could not understand why he had consented immediately to marry her. And why had he brought that minister along? To prove their marriage? Nelsa could not please herself by believing that.

She felt that once New York was reached Warden would evade her. She could picture her aristocratic business-like father, her dainty mother, her cousins and aunts and brothers—what would they say about it? Perhaps with their assistance she might hold him. But—and here tears welled into Nelsa's bright eyes—she would not wish to hold him that way.

After a time she saw the great flare leap up on the hill above—the signal to any passing ship that assistance was needed. But did ships ever pass that island? How far had their boat traveled since leaving the sinking Superba?

She saw the headlines in the papers at home, saw her family's distress. She supposed the ship had sent out radio calls for help. Perhaps some vessel, hurrying to their help, would find them. That great flare should show for miles.

Brown had long since left Phillida. The girl, wrapped in her cloak, was curled up at the rim of the firelight, apparently asleep. The unreal groups across the fire murmured, fell silent, murmured again, and at last became quiet. After their terrible experience, exhaustion claimed the stranded ones. All save Nelsa.

Seated with her back against a rock, her eyes on the fire, she felt that never again could she rest. She was thirsty, but proud to remember that Warden had told her alone about the buried cask of water. They shared that if nothing else.

If they might be prisoners on that island until she won him! Here they were just man and woman. In the morning the little minister would probably proclaim they were man and wife. Then what would Kirk Brown say, Brown who had lately held the little dancer in his arms? Her lip curled.

And then suddenly every nerve was taut. A step she knew and loved was approaching. In another instant, not seeing her, Warden paused beside the fire. He was looking toward the quiet form of Phillida, not searching for her, his bride!

Nelsa, hands clenched, watched the tall boyish figure as it approached the sleeping girl, noted that his step had become noiseless, that he moved like a shadow.

Her heart beat sickeningly and blinding tears welled into her eyes. She wanted to dash through the fire and seize him, claim him, scream that he was hers, no other girl should have him! What had happened to her, the dainty, the haughty, the well bred Nelsa Trent?

Warden was bending above Phillida, his hands busy with her cloak. The girl seemed to sleep. While Nelsa watched Warden stood erect, something in his hands, something he slipped into his pocket.

BUT Nelsa did not stay to see anything else. On fleet feet she was flying from the spot, stumbling up the hills, over the sand dunes in her haste, her breath coming shortly, her cheeks scarlet.

Her one idea was to reach that flare, to put it out!

If a ship, possibly answering the calls of the sinking Superba, saw the signal and took them off the island now Warden, though wedded to her, would be lost to her, she knew! She must have a chance to battle against Phillida, to match her charms against those of the dancer, to win Warden for her own for all time!

For the moment Nelsa was not herself. Her usually clear brain was not functioning. She had no thought as she stumbled toward that lighted hill of the men and women shipwrecked with them; of the fact that all the water they possessed was buried somewhere in a cask!

The flare had been well set. It was larger and more forbidding than she imagined when at last she reached it. How to put it out?

Trees grew near by, trees that dripped still with water. Nelsa tore away one good sized branch and began to beat the flames. She could never afterward remember that moment clearly, and when a hand fell on her arm and forced her about to meet Warden's angry eyes, she wakened to the enormity of her act.

Her haughty head lifted, eyes shining with defiance.

"What are you doing?" demanded her bridegroom sharply.

Nelsa did not reply. How could

she? She could not tell this man that for love of him, for fear that he would care for the dancer, with desire that they two might remain shipwrecked on that island, she had sought to destroy their call for aid!

"Nelsa!" said Warden again more quietly. "Why were you putting out our flare?"

"I shall not tell you!" said Nelsa hotly. "Not if you ask me forever!"

"You!" Warden said slowly, looking into her white, defiant face. "I would never have believed that of you. But it must be because you do not understand. We are in a desperate situation. We may all starve or die of thirst."

"Warden," the girl said desperately, "why did you bring Kirk Brown and the minister with you in that boat? Did you hit Kirk again?"

"Yes," said Warden gravely. "I had to. But I shall tell you nothing else until you confess what made you do this dreadful thing just now."

As Nelsa did not answer he caught her arms in a close grasp and bent his grim lipped, handsome face to hers.

"You are a spoiled little beauty," he grated. "Like the rest of your class, you grab for what you want at any cost. You asked me to marry you just to escape Brown, not caring what trouble that meant for your family or me. You became the bride of your fiancé's manservant! You tried to buy me. Now, for some reason of your own, you play with the lives of ten men and women on this island."

Rage tingled through and through Nelsa. She sought vainly to free herself.

"You are not a manservant," she cried. "I have always known it. And I didn't try to buy you. How dare you say that? Do you know who I am?"

"Yes," said Warden grimly. "Everybody knows who you are. Who you were before last night. But just now you are only a girl, a woman like the others down there, whose hope for life perhaps you have just tried to beat out. If you do not give me your word never to attempt this again I shall have to have you guarded or—bound."

Nelsa could not believe her ears. Her face was flushed with the rose hue of breathless anger.

"I am something else," she breathed. "I am your wife."

A strange smile twisted Warden's lips.

"I have not forgotten that," he said gravely. "Go back to the fire. I'm staying here the rest of the night."

Nelsa clenched her hands, her head flung back and her flashing eyes challenging his. The great flare threw her beauty into high relief.

"You don't trust me," she said in a low tense voice. "You think I would put it out again."

"Yes," said Warden briefly. "Though why is beyond me. We may die on this island if help does not come soon. You are young and lovely and very rich. You hold an envied position out in the world. All life is before you. Tell me why you tried to put out this flare, Nelsa."

"No," said Nelsa in a choked little voice as she turned away, "I will never tell you that!"

PICKING her way down the hill in the light from the huge fire, Nelsa did not look back at his tall young figure standing before the blaze. Her eyes were blinded by sudden tears and she felt bewildered.

The fact that he was stranded upon an island, romantically enough, with a bride so many young men had sought,

seemingly made no impression upon Warden. All he thought of was safety. And—perhaps—Phillida! But why, then, had he yielded to her insane demand during that dramatic moment on deck that he marry her?

She would never give him up, never!

She had reached darkness now, beyond the reach of the great flare. The pound of the surf came to her clearly, and some distance away she saw the camp fires about which the people were grouped. There lay the girl Phillida, curled in her flimsy cloak, a lure, apparently, for all the men!

Nelsa shivered, and then suddenly stood still. Close to her, yet entirely invisible in the darkness, two men were speaking. She recognized Kirk Brown's voice.

"You say he let you marry him to Nelsa Trent and yet you think he is the man?" Brown was asking.

The answering voice was that of the minister in the second cabin, the man who had married them! Nelsa would have recognized it anywhere.

"I thought all the time that he was playing a game, that he knew right well I was no minister, but your pal. I was sure that the thing was as much a farce on his part as it was on mine. Only the girl was deceived. She must hate you, Brown."

Brown chuckled grimly.

"Yes. But she will marry me some day. She may know, Peter, that Warden is not a valet. She may know that he is in the Army Intelligence Bureau, that now and then he works for the Federal Secret Service. I've feared him for months, but I didn't know what the fellow looked like. But don't think Nelsa isn't clever. She has worried me on this trip more than once."

There was a tense silence, during which Nelsa feared the two men could hear her heart pound. Then Brown spoke again.

"Anyhow, while it is apparent from his treatment of me that he is either the man we fear or a valet with a swelled head because of Miss Trent's behavior, the stuff is safe enough—now. Mine, that is. I've been in a tight corner before this. Better dispose of what you carry, Pete."

The men were moving away. Leaning against a tree Nelsa heard them go, knew that she was alone.

A strange desolation settled down upon her. Dully she took in the fact that when Kirk Brown asked her to marry him he knew the ceremony would be a farce, that the so-called minister was his partner in a crooked game. And Warden was a member of the United States Army Intelligence! He was trailing Kirkland Brown for something! When he had consented so willingly to go through the marriage ceremony with her he had known that the man who performed it was a crook whom he expected to arrest!

No wonder he had treated the matter so lightly. He had *used her* to reach that second man, the masquerading minister!

Turning her head, Nelsa looked up at the great flare and saw clearly Warden's tall, strong figure silhouetted against it. A sob caught in her throat. He was not her husband! When they landed—if ever they did—that unreal ceremony in the stuffy little second cabin could be wiped out as though it had never been! Only the pressure of the heavy seal ring against her soft breast told her she had not imagined that hour on the sinking Superba.

Warden had never cared for her. He had just told her she had tried to buy him. That she was spoiled, grab-

bing for whatever she wanted. He must think she had wanted him! And he had smiled strangely when she reminded him that she was his wife.

Nelsa shivered with rage. The desolate feeling left her and she knew that she had never been so angry in her life. To be forced into the position she was in before these three men—she, the lovely, the fêted, the sought—was unendurable. Going through a mock marriage service with a man she believed to be a servant!

Her startled eyes looked up at the minister, Peter, who stood over her with a gun in his hand

Yet she loved him wildly! Despite her anger and her hurt, she knew that Warden Lansing was the one man in all the world for her.

DAWN was still some distance off. Nelsa, unconscious of fatigue, so tensely were her nerves strung, felt that she could not lie down near the fire again. She must seek Warden and tell him that she had known all along that he was with the Secret Service, that Brown was a crook and that the man in the second cabin had not been a minister.

He would not believe her, of course, but it would at least make her feel better to have told him. Her pride had come to her rescue. She was beaten. Warden could go his way if ever they got off the island. He could, of course, after that night, have nothing but contempt for her.

As she climbed the hill toward the flare her fingers worked with the platinum chain about her throat, drawing his seal ring away from the tender

white haven of her warm flesh. Misery unspeakable was in her heart, but her beautiful little head was held high.

As she drew near to the huge fire she saw Warden's figure, stretched upon the ground in a position that caused her to stop for a moment with startled nerves. And then she ran forward, a sob in her throat, and, kneeling beside him, turned his face about and touched with tender fingers the bruise on the back of his head where some heavy weapon had struck.

Of course, Brown and Peter, knowing themselves trapped, had crept up behind Warden and knocked him temporarily out. Their next move would be to take the boat. The boat! That meant that whether they got away alive or not Warden would probably never get his quarry or "the stuff" they carried.

Making sure that her lover breathed, Nelsa laid him gently down again and darted back down the hill toward the camp fire. She knew of no one she could trust save Phillida, and the dancing girl had given her no reason to think highly of her. The identity of the others in the party she did not know. If Rand Magill was with them she had not seen him. But Phillida had given her her coat. There must be some kindness in the other girl's heart.

Nelsa bent over the sleeping Phillida and shook her awake. A few words told the dancer what had happened and Phillida sprang to her feet.

"Here," she whispered, thrusting a small cold something into Nelsa's hand. "Use this if you have to. I never go anywhere without it. Slip the safety catch and it'll shoot more times than you'll want. I'll beat it up to Warden and stick there with him."

As she spoke a stealthy step came around the fire and Phillida slipped back into the darkness, drawing Nelsa with her.

"That's Brown, come for me before he beats it," she said grimly. "Run. I'll look after your boy friend."

As Nelsa turned about and made for the spot where she had seen the boat had been drawn up she pondered Phillida's strange words. Brown was coming for her before he "beat it!" Why on earth should Kirk Brown do that? It was evident that though the dancer had wished to "show" the society man the power of her charms, she did not wish him to find her now!

Filled with anxiety for Warden, forced to trust Phillida, Nelsa grasped the small revolver and made her cautious way toward the boat. If the man both girls had heard approaching the fire had indeed been Kirk Brown, she would be in time to keep them from taking the boat. If she shot once it would rouse the other men in the party.

Drawn into a safe place up on the sand was the huge heavy boat that had carried ten of them safely from the sinking Superba. It would not be possible for her, she found at once, to move that boat. The oars were safely placed inside it, but, stooping and feeling about, she found only two. Warden, she fancied, had hidden the others. No one could get far in that boat with only two oars. Seating herself upon the side of it, Nelsa removed the safety catch from Phillida's revolver, the cool smooth feel of the steel in her hot hand calming her.

FOR an interminable time she sat there in the chill darkness, listening until her head ached, her mind running over her fantastic situation. Waiting there armed against Kirkland Brown, whom she had known

all her life, whose estate joined their own on Long Island, whose wife she was to have been! The fastidious, much-traveled Kirkland Brown a crook! And he would have married her with a mock ceremony! From the thought of that false minister she shrank, pressing her exquisite lips together, her heart pounding against Warden's seal ring.

If they had killed Warden she would get them, or lose her life trying! At that moment Nelsa Trent was a cave woman; she had reverted to some beautiful ancestress who had fought boldly for her own.

And then, while she sat there, grasping the dancer's small weapon, something fell over her head, steel fingers seized her wrists and wrenched away the little revolver, and she was lifted bodily into the boat.

Conscious of the motion as the heavy boat was run out into water, Nelsa struggled wildly, throwing her pride to the winds, furious that she had failed in her effort to help Warden. Feeling the bands secured about her wrists and ankles, however, she desisted, biting her lips, raging, but determined to save her strength for whatever might happen next. She might still win.

That Warden Lansing would get these men she had no doubt at all. But she had wanted so eagerly to do her bit, after her insane attempt to put out that flare!

The boat went on for some time while Nelsa lay in muffled choking silence. At last it was drawn up on what was evidently another beach, and she was lifted out and carried for some distance.

Evidently the two men were not intending to leave the island just then. As far as she could judge they were planning to leave her upon another part of it.

Nelsa felt the heavy thing taken from her head. Her startled eyes looked up at the minister, Peter, who stood over her with a pistol in his hand.

"You won't scream, Miss Trent," he grinned. "You see, we had to have the boat or we wouldn't have troubled you."

And then Nelsa became aware that beside her lay the slim form of the dancing girl, Phillida, bound and gagged!

Warden, lying unconscious, flashed into her mind. In a panic she turned her white face to Phillida's and was startled to see one of the dancer's beautiful eyes close significantly.

Kirkland Brown knelt beside Phillida, removing the handkerchief from her mouth. He did not look at her, and the girl felt that he was, for all his brazenness, ashamed.

"Phillida, what did you do with it?" he grated, close to the dancing girl's defiant face. "Tell me. Where did you put it? I know you haven't got it now. I tell you that we are desperate. Warden thinks he has us in a trap, but he hasn't. He's been after us for months. We've got the boat and we are armed. It will be an hour yet before daylight. *Where is the package I gave you to keep for me?*"

"When you take us back to the bunch and hand over that boat to Warden, I'll tell you, Mister Brown," mocked Phillida.

NELSA was remembering then, bewildered as she was. She saw again Kirk Brown making love to the dancer beside the huge camp fire, saw the stealthy figure of Warden creeping toward the sleeping girl, saw him stoop over her, searching in her

cloak, felt again her own unreasoning jealousy which had inspired her to race up the hill to put out the flare!

Brown had given Phillida something precious to keep for him, probably the "stuff" she had heard the men speak of, but Warden had taken it from the girl. She felt sure that Phillida did not know what had become of the packet.

"I might be a bit more agreeable if you'd give me a drink," Phillida was saying plaintively. "And untie my hands. I've got a few trinkets in a bag around my neck and there is a pin hurting me."

Nelsa listened attentively, for she felt sure that Phillida was not anxious to have a drink of anything. She was playing some sort of game.

The man Peter handed Phillida a flask immediately while Brown took the bands from the girl's wrists. As she watched him, Nelsa decided that the packet he had given Phillida must be very precious.

The little dancer thrust her hand into the neck of her torn evening gown, seemed to arrange the sharp pin and took the flask Peter offered. Her laughing eyes looked up at the two men as she did so.

"You see, I know where that package is," she taunted. "And nobody else does. You better treat me square, and Miss Trent, too. What goes for me goes for her."

Brown turned to Peter in desperation as Phillida lifted the flask.

"We have no time to lose," he muttered. "If you can suggest a way to get it out of her, go ahead."

With a wry face, Phillida handed the flask back to Peter, who took a long drink and gave it to Kirk Brown.

"Don't try to tell me that's pre-war," she sniffed.

And again to the desperate white anxiety in Nelsa's face she flung a gay little reassuring nod.

Nelsa managed to turn about until in the distance she could glimpse the flare high up on the hill. They were behind it, in a part of the island she had not as yet seen. If morning would only come! A fine muddle she had made of it. Instead of wishing to hold off these two crooks single-handed she should have shot Phillida's gun into the air and called the rest of the party to guard the boat.

Brown was looking at the luminous dial of his wrist watch.

"Phillida, I will give you fifteen minutes," he said roughly. "You understand that by that time you've got to tell me what you did with that packet or I shall stop at nothing to get it out of you. That packet is more precious to me than your life or a dozen other lives. I gave it to you because I thought—"

"Because you thought you could make use of me, just a cheap, common little dancing girl—you, the snob, the fastidious gentleman, the millionaire, Kirkland Brown!" laughed Phillida bitterly. "You, the crook! Well, you can't make use of me. You'll never get that packet until you take Miss Trent and me back to the camp fire. And that's that. I'd seen a little of the world before I saw you on the Superba, big boy."

Nelsa shivered. Her respect for the dancer mounted each moment. Never in the world could she have dealt with the situation as Phillida was dealing with it. But how they were to get out of it she could not see.

"I'm giving you fifteen minutes," nodded Brown curtly. "You won't get another chance to tell us. Remember that."

"Oh, yeah?" mocked Phillida as Peter slipped the gag about her face again. "Then you'll never find the package!"

Nelsa made no resistance as Peter knotted another handkerchief over her lips. She was sick with disgust, frozen with horror.

Peter and Brown had gone off a short distance and were seated on a rock talking in low tones. They were indeed in a desperate situation, Nelsa knew. They had the boat, but only two oars. And they were forced into the open sea. They were afraid to stay on the island until rescue came. Rescue, from what she had been able to gather, meant a jail term.

THEN she became aware of movements. Phillida was moving her head against the rock behind her. After a moment Nelsa saw that she was loosening the knotted handkerchief at the back of her curly head. She watched her with fascinated eyes, but did not know that the girl had accomplished her purpose until her voice came to her, a mere breath.

"Sleeping potion in that flask," said Phillida. "Had it in my gown in the bag round my neck. It's powerful. Doctor gave it to me in Paris. I put it all in. Brown has been drinking, too. We can tie them up if it takes effect."

Nelsa nodded to indicate that she understood, but her pleading eyes begged for more, and Phillida winked.

"He was coming around when these birds grabbed me," she breathed. "We gotta move, because I don't know where that package is. Somebody took it from me. Work your hands against the rock if you can. I've got my feet loose. Used to do a wrestling stunt in vaudeville."

It was weary work obeying Phillida, but Nelsa set herself to accomplish it, striving against knots that had been cleverly tied.

In no time at all, it seemed, she felt the little dancer's hands about her, pulling, loosening, jerking, while the voices of the two men grew lower, ceased.

Neither girl spoke as Phillida loosened the bonds that held Nelsa Trent. Then the dancer placed soft lips against Nelsa's ear.

"They're sunk," she whispered delightedly. "They're under for hours. You gotta measure out the stuff I gave them by drops and I just poured it into that flask. We'll wait a minute and then we'll frisk them."

"Frisk them?" asked Nelsa, moving her stiff lips with difficulty.

"Yes. Get their guns. Then we'll tie them up and go and tell your precious Warden where his prisoners are. Gee, I wish I had had time to tell Rand!"

"Rand?" Nelsa felt a little shock of surprise as she knelt on the sand beside Phillida and rubbed her ankles and wrists.

"Sure," smiled the dancer. "I'm marrying him when we get off this island, if ever we do. We were fixing that when the old Superba ran her nose into a reef or something."

"I'm glad," said Nelsa simply. "But you're too good for him, Phillida."

"You wouldn't have said that last night on the ship, Miss Trent," said Phillida gravely.

"Hush!" Nelsa flushed painfully as she laid her hand on Phillida's cheek. "I've lived years since then. I was a worthless, spoiled, selfish girl. I'm not much more now, but I've learned some things."

Phillida nodded and turned to the slumped figures of the two men a few feet away.

"We've got work to do," she whispered. "You take Peter and I'll take Brown. Get everything they've got in their pockets. These pieces of linen and handkerchiefs they used on us will do to bind them with."

Nelsa was surprised to see how easy it was to go through the pockets of the man who had read that false marriage ceremony over her and the man she loved. She placed a gun, the flask, several papers and a small flat packet on the ground beside her, while Phillida did the same with Brown. Both men were breathing heavily and seemed totally unconscious.

While the girls, with no small effort, tied them up as best they could, drawing Peter some distance away from his confederate, Phillida several times looked closely into their faces.

"I hope I didn't do for them," she murmured. "Guess they deserve it, but I'd hate to knock them out for good. That was some dose! But what could I do? It was them or us. If they couldn't get off this island they'd have done in Warden. He was the only one who could have had the goods on them, who could have handed them in to the cops when some liner takes us off here, if any ever does."

"He told you that?" breathed Nelsa with a twinge of jealousy.

"He did not. But I got my senses," snapped Phillida. "Now, I guess the best way for us to get back to the crowd is the way these crooks brought us, by water. We'd be hours working our way back over this island. Can you row?"

"Why—yes," said Nelsa.

"Come on, then."

Her hands filled with the things she had taken from Peter's pockets, Nelsa followed the dancing girl.

ONCE in the boat each girl took an oar and, keeping close to land, worked their way laboriously around a point toward the flare which burned bravely far above them. Her lovely eyes fixed upon it, Nelsa wondered if Warden still guarded it—against her!

It was not easy going, and they had to rest now and then, but just as dawn was tinting the horizon a faint pink they drove the heavy boat close in to land not far from the camp fire.

"Look behind you!" whispered Phillida suddenly in a voice that danced as gayly as her little feet had danced the night before. "Am I seeing things or is that a rocket? We're rescued, or I'm going crazy!"

The two girls sprang from the boat and held its bow while shadowy figures ran toward them from the camp fire. Nelsa looked around toward the sea and her heart gave a bound as she saw, shooting into the sky, the gay crimson tongues of several rockets.

"A ship has seen our flare," she said dully and turned from the boat as Rand Magill ran past her to clasp Phillida in his arms and bombard her with questions.

They would be taken off the island now. She would have no time with Warden at all. What had been done, Phillida had accomplished. She was just what Warden had said she was, useless, selfish.

Behind Nelsa another rocket soared skyward. Somebody cheered. And then a young man collided with her, turned a flash light on her startled face, stopped with an apology.

"Great Scott, Miss Trent, some-

body said you were in this party!" said a young eager voice. "I looked everywhere for you. I want to get the straight of that wedding in the second cabin last night."

"Wedding!" gasped Nelsa.

"Why, yes, yours," said the young voice. "My name is Brant. I'm on the New York *News*. Just before that crash came I got word that you had married the valet of Kirkland Brown down in the second cabin. I'd been sitting pretty on the Superba waiting to get the first news of your engagement to Brown as the liner docked. And when I got that I just about hit the air. Beat it down to that little minister chap and he confirmed it. Gee, then I went up to the radio room and got the chap there to send the word in to my paper. Luck was with me. I got him just before he started on those calls for help.

"Then when we were stranded here, naturally I wanted to get hold of you and have you tell me about it. This is a big scoop for me. Did my best to grab the Warden chap, but he has been just about everywhere to-night."

Nelsa stood as though paralyzed, staring through the white glare of the flash light into the young reporter's face. He was just a youngster, just a boy to have done this dreadful thing to her! She could scarcely believe it. The only hope she had had since discovering what Brown and the false minister really were was that the past hectic night, with all its mistakes, might wipe out that ceremony!

And now this boy, avid for news about her, as the papers had always been, had sent tearing through the chaotic night the word of her disgrace!

Before she could speak, however, Warden stepped out of the darkness and stood beside her.

"I've been looking for you everywhere," he said quietly. "I've been talking to Phillida. To thank you seems hardly enough. That was marvelous work on the part of you two girls! I'm getting around after those chaps now, though Phillida says they'll sleep, if they don't actually cash in, for hours yet."

The young reporter put out a swift hand and seized Warden's arm.

"I say, will you give me some details about your wedding down in the second cabin last night?" he begged. "I was telling Miss Trent—er—Mrs. Warden—that I sent word in to my paper about it just before the ship started sending out calls for help. I've got a great story, sir, to tell about the wreck and our stay on this island and the way you managed that last boat. If I can add a few details about your marriage to Nelsa Trent it will sure make me with the paper. You understand that."

"I understand," Warden was saying gravely. "And I'll tell you all you can possibly want to hear. My name is Warden Lansing. I have a commission in the Army Intelligence Bureau and now and then the Federal Secret Service uses me. For months I've been trailing this Kirkland Brown and his pal, the little minister chap. They are internationally known jewel thieves and smugglers. I only just got on to his identity in Monte Carlo and fastened myself on him as a valet. They have just made an attempt to get off this island after knocking me out temporarily as I guarded the flare up above there. I have Miss Trent and Phillida, the little dancing girl, to thank that they did not get away in the boat. You'll get all that later on. I want the girls given full credit for the capture of these men. Got to run along

now, old chap. That ship yonder is sending in a boat."

As Warden turned away, Brant's young face fell, grew horrified.

"Holy smoke, Miss Trent!" he blurted. "Wasn't that marriage legal, then? Was that minister a crook?"

"Yes," said Nelsa, fighting an alarming desire to laugh. "Mr. Lansing will tell you about that later on."

And, leaving the alarmed young reporter staring after her, she fled across the sand after the tall figure of Warden.

EVERY one else was grouped by the water awaiting the arrival of the rescue boat, while out at sea the rockets still soared skyward.

Nelsa put out a swift hand and laid it on Warden's arm. He flung about and faced her, his eager eyes drinking in her exquisite face and parted lips.

"Warden," said Nelsa simply, "I've brought you the things I took from the man Peter's pockets. Phillida has the contents of Kirk Brown's. Before we are taken from this island I want to tell you how ashamed and sorry I am. I am all that you called me a few hours ago when I tried to put out that flare. I could not even hold the boat against those two men. If it had not been for Phillida they would have got away. Phillida held them at first by pretending that she knew where the package was which Brown had given her to keep for him."

"I know," nodded Warden, his hungry gaze still on her rose-flushed face. "The package was unset gems. The one you have given me is, I believe, another. How those men have been taking them and then getting them into our country has stumped us for a long time. Of course Brown's high social position and wealth protected him for months. I myself took that package from Phillida while she slept and buried it. And now, thanks to you girls, I have all the evidence I need against those men."

"Thanks to Phillida," said Nelsa obstinately, turning away from his eyes. "I did nothing. The only thing now that worries me is the news that ridiculous boy flashed to his paper about our marriage. I'm afraid that will not be so easy to straighten out. I am sorry."

Warden just put out his arms and drew Nelsa into them, holding her closer and closer until she was forced to lift her flowerlike face to his, a bewildered sweetness in her eyes.

"Nelsa, you are not going to put me out of your life like that," he said tenderly, his eager lips very close to hers. "I loved you the first night you came to Kirk Brown's party. We are meant for each other. As far as I am concerned, that marriage ceremony on the Superba was the real thing. I tried to kid myself into thinking so. I pretended that you loved me. If that kid reporter has flashed it to the world that you and I were married it will never be denied by me. The captain of the liner that is taking us off this island can marry us in reality. I adore you, Nelsa! You are the one girl for me. Say you'll marry me!"

Nelsa fancied that she dreamed. The flare up above them, the shouts down at the shore where the ship's boats were arriving to take the stranded ones from the island, the rose hue of the coming day, all seemed the setting for a wild, exquisite dream.

Yet Warden's lips, his eager, passionate eyes were very real, and with a little sigh she gave herself to him, her arms closing about his neck, her beautiful mouth uplifted to his.

She tossed the reins aside and sprang down into the young American's arms

Romany Love

By PEARLE E. BOTSFORD

CYNTHIA FRANCE glanced restlessly about the great cool living room of her guardian's home. Something like the look of a trapped animal lurked in her black-fringed, dark gray eyes. She plucked at the green silk sport costume she was wearing, slim white fingers trembling a little.

Across the room, huddled in a big tapestry-covered chair, sat her nurse Prima, a wizened creature, dusky skinned and old. She watched Cynthia, beady black eyes cunning.

"We could go away and learn the truth. Only yesterday I saw the patrin. Our people have been here, as thou knowest, waiting for the birth of the Queen's child. A puny one it is for all their waiting," Prima murmured at last. "Surely in three short years thou hast not lost thy knowledge of thy mother's people."

Cynthia bit her red lip but said nothing.

"We could leave while the *gorgio* guardian sleeps and be far on our way along trails he couldn't follow," wheedled the nurse. "My pretty could once more sleep on fragrant pine boughs under a crimson *tan*. Who knows but that, around a heedless camp fire, there might not be talk of Anselo and Athalie."

Almost breathlessly the old woman waited. If she could get this foster child back to Romany camps again—

Cynthia winced and flung herself to

her feet to walk the length of the room. She had the slim, swaying grace of a young birch, but was an alien figure in the luxurious room by reason of her very restlessness. Curling blue-black hair framed her slender pale face and her mouth could light her face to laughter or darken it to brooding.

"Look at these," she said at last, in a soft, musical voice, and she held out her hands. "How long would they fool a Romany?"

"But, *boro pappin,* we can stain them! Give me but an hour and thou shalt pass even thy guardian unnoticed," eagerly from the woman.

Cynthia paused before a window, but looked unseeingly out on velvet lawns and blossoming hedges. "If I thought for one minute, Prima, that I could find out who this Anselo was, I would go at once," she said.

"We will go," Prima said calmly. "Much shall we learn before thou hast again any roof but the stars."

She waited and was rewarded at last by Cynthia's nod.

"All right. Go out and buy all we'll need. Be on the drive two hours before dawn and I'll be ready."

Prima hurried away and Cynthia went slowly up the winding staircase to her room, followed by the servants' sympathetic looks. None in the household but would have sacrificed a right hand to take away the brooding sadness from the girl's gray eyes, the wistful look from her sweet mouth. Though she had been home but a week from school in Italy, she had won the hearts of old and young on the Graham estate.

DAWN found a wagon drawn by sturdy ponies well on its way into the north following a patrin read by Prima as they traveled.

Gone was the slim girl in smart sport frock. In her place rode a dusky-skinned girl in scarlet and yellow calico, many gold coins strung about her person. Slim, sure brown hands held the reins and kept the fiery ponies to the sandy trail. Prima nodded beside the young driver, content for the first time since she had stepped on alien shores.

Yesterday Cynthia France had been the Graham ward, daughter of a Romany mother and wealthy American father. To-day she was Synfie of the Italian Zingani.

It was late afternoon of the following day when the travelers reached the lake called the Silver Bowl, rendezvous of the Romany tribes. Already, though the patrin had been newly laid, its shores were dotted with camps of all kinds, camps on trunks and on wagons, tents pitched on the soft white sand, big ones and little ones and in the most desirable place of all the queen's tent with its closely drawn flaps.

Synfie knew she had to have audience with the queen first to gain permission to stay, and an ancient crone led the way inside where a very wan queen lay among the bright covers.

She looked Synfie over cannily and Prima, lurking at the girl's heels, was glad that her charge was slim and straight and lovely. Glad she had many golden coins clinking about her throat and arms and ankles. She knew that a young and pretty Romany maid is a welcome addition to a gypsy camp, for *gorgios'* silver flows more freely when a pretty girl's eyes are watching.

The queen nodded at last, then eagerly pushed back the quilts to show the newcomer the prized heir. Not even to Synfie did the baby look odd in its orange print dress sprigged with bright green leaves, gold rings in her

tiny ears and a string of coins about her neck.

When Synfie had duly admired the baby the queen called a pretty girl from the rear of the camp. "Britta, show the Italian Zingani the best place to pitch her *tan*."

Britta came willingly and walked with Synfie along the lake shore. They came at last to a gurgling trout stream and here the two girls, with Prima's able assistance, pitched the crimson oiled silk tent. Several handsome Romany lads lingering near watched boldly but without offering to help, since pitching camp was woman's work.

Synfie had not been so happy since her guardian had taken her from the American school years ago because she had scratched and slapped a pretty blue-eyed girl who had called her gypsy and whispered some scandal about her mother; scandal the young ears would not believe until she had had to hear it again, told gently and sorrowfully, by her gray-haired guardian.

Prima ate at the central fire, but Synfie had taken a vow not to do two things: eat at the central fire or fall in love with a gypsy. There were several handsome men; one of them was Britta's sweetheart, Chivo, the knife man. He wore Britta's red scarf and she wore his, wooing scarves that told the gypsy world they were sweethearts. Synfie had but one use for her mother's people: to learn the truth about her mother and lay at rest the ancient scandal.

Synfie slept until noon on her bed of spruce boughs, but refused invitations to go for berries, pleading that she was still weary from her long drive. Except for a few old women dozing in the doorways of the tents the camp was soon deserted.

Britta and the queen's mother were making osier baskets at the rear of the queen's tent, within call of the arrogant young ruler. Synfie lingered, talking to them a moment and thus it was she was too far from her own camp to hide when two visitors came riding in. They dismounted and came forward as they saw the girl. In the lead was a tall, blond young fellow and panting at his heels a plump girl who could be none other than his sister.

"Speaka da Englees?" questioned the girl in the tongue an American fondly imagines to be understandable to the foreigner.

"Yes, I speak English," Synfie replied curtly.

"Well, thank goodness," cried the girl not at all abashed by her evident scorn. "I'm not a bit good at sign languages. We are the MacManus twins from the lodge several miles up the pike. This is my brother Jerry, and I am Molly," expansively.

"That is enough family history, Molly," interrupted her brother rudely, and Synfie could see that he must often have to sit down hard on his twin's friendliness. "We're having a house party and came to see if one of you would pitch a camp on the grounds the night of our masked garden party and tell fortunes. We would pay you well, besides the money our guests would naturally give you."

Synfie sank gracefully to her heels. "How much?" bluntly.

He named a sum over which they haggled until Molly interrupted the bargaining to say, "Oh, come on, please. *You're* the only one that will do. You look like all my dreams of gypsy girls come true."

"Don't be soft, Molly! Name your own price then, I'll pay it," Jerry said impatiently.

" That is a bad thing to tell a Romany," Synfie said humorously. "However, since we're to be in camp all summer I won't ask so much and maybe you will come and see us occasionally, yes?" looking at him through her long lashes. She could not help it: he looked so much like a pompous, spoiled young blood.

" Maybe, if you're a good girl," with a sudden quick look as if seeing her for the first time.

" Thanks," she murmured naughtily, long lashes resting demurely against her cheeks.

Jerry MacManus glanced at her again. Why, the gypsy was as beautiful as an American with some added charm he could not understand.

" Molly, Fancy shouldn't crop those weeds. Jerk her up short!" he said with the evident intention of being alone for a moment with this new type of girl.

Molly turned obediently toward her horse tethered a few yards away. " I will go with you," offered Synfie slyly; " then I can tell you if they are dangerous weeds."

SHE turned and went with Molly, and Jerry was forced to go along or be left alone. The brother and sister left soon and Synfie picked up her rod and went toward the trout stream. They would return, and that was what she wanted. She could not be a drone. Her share seemed to be to attract wealthy *gorgios* to the camp, that her people might have a chance to display their wares.

She whipped the stream with little success and was about to reel in when another reel sang and a fly sailed past. Resentfully Synfie pulled in her line, looking across at the other bank. By good rights all the men should be cutting willows far away, near the swamp.

Lazily playing the trout that his cast had brought to the hook was the handsomest Romany she had ever seen. His merry dark eyes mocked hers across the narrow chuckling stream as he asked, in his native tongue, " Do you talk Romany, my sister?"

Synfie looked across at him in silence. He was splendidly built and wore the gay shirt and green velveteens of the more affluent gypsy. Jet black hair waved from a high forehead, and he had a slanting, irresistible smile. Suddenly she remembered her vow not to become interested in any Romany man. She turned back up the path but, because it seemed ill-bred not to reply, she looked over her shoulder as the blackberry bushes closed about her and wished him good day.

Perhaps she wished to air her knowledge of the language. There were so many polyglot mixtures spoken and so few spoke the true Romany in America. This stranger knew it and so did Synfie and it established a bond she reluctantly admitted. Even the gypsies have caste.

While she lighted her evening fire and scrubbed potatoes for baking, the unknown stayed in her mind. So many camps had she and Prima stayed in, in Italy, without seeing a single Romany that really attracted, and now in her first camp in America she had met this one. Well, he mustn't interest her any more than Britta's Chivo, she resolved.

Scarcely had she laid the potatoes in the hot ashes before the stranger strolled up and knelt down to lay four plump trout wrapped in bracken beside her.

She glanced up at him, troubled at his seeking her out. His black eyes danced into hers, so very near he knelt.

" I spoiled your fishing, but I'll share my catch if you'll share your potatoes,

cold one," he said, his scarlet mouth twitching a little with the laughter that tugged at the corners of it.

"And why not eat at the central fire where there are many potatoes?" Synfie tried to ask indifferently.

"There are too many greasy fingers dipping into the same pot, as thou knowest, else why dost thou eat alone?" he retorted, dropping into the more intimate thee and thou. He sat down beside her, taking her consent for granted. "You are new to the camp, my sister?"

"Yes, I am Synfie of the Italian Zingani."

"I am Lasho, the Gitano." So the bold one was Spanish, for just as gypsy is English so is Zingani Italian and Gitano Spanish, and tells the country that mothered the Romany.

When potatoes and trout were done Synfie watched the stranger slyly as he ate and was ill-pleased that he did not lick his fingers as even the best Romany would do; surely there must be something about him that would make her dislike him. There was already fear in her heart, for he made it beat faster when he looked deep into her eyes or touched her hand with his long, slender brown ones, that she was to learn later were so very strong.

There was no mistaking his nationality. It was not walnut stain that dyed his skin golden brown, as it had hers; the sun and his dusky blood had attended to that. He talked little and she was glad. About the central fire the clans clattered, dogs barked and children wailed. That was the reason she had pitched her camp so far from the rest. Only Prima reveled in the noise and general disorder of the central fire.

After supper Lasho strolled away and Synfie did up her camp work. Britta did not leave her long alone, for a great attraction had sprung up between the two girls. Chivo followed her closely; then others came to ask eager questions concerning friends in Italy. Now and then some one twanged a guitar or lifted liquid voice in song. Prima squatted near, her brown face ashine with joy. She was back where she belonged, but on the face of her charge there was no real joy. The sadness lurked in the smoke-gray shadows in Synfie's eyes.

A fat little middle-aged gypsy sidled up, his eyes on Synfie's face. He carried a guitar and the fingers that plucked out a rollicking mazurka were grimed with dirt. To escape his evil pig eyes the girl sprang up and began to dance. At once several of the men were on their feet, but the newcomer Lasho, pushed them away, his eyes flashing black warnings at them. The two danced together as they were to dance in the firelight often in the nights to come.

"A handsomer pair never danced to that tune since Anselo and Athalie danced to it on this very spot when I was a young man. That was before Anselo went to Italy," the fat man said loudly, and his face was bitten with spiteful pain as he looked keenly at Synfie.

Synfie flung herself down beside Britta. "Knew you Athalie well?" she asked, keeping by a great effort the sliver of pain from cutting her question and betraying her agitation. Athalie had been her mother. "And who was Anselo?" All the tragedy of Synfie's childhood hung on the answer to that question.

The fat man spat contemptuously into the fire and rose to his feet, looking down at her with his greedy little eyes full of malice, "Who can tell?"

he asked with a shrug and waddled away.

Britta spoke shyly: "'Tis said that Athalie was Peter's sweetheart in his youth and a *gorgio* took her away. She was the old king's daughter, you know."

Lasho's voice came warningly in Synfie's ear and so close did he lean, so no one could hear, that his breath stirred the little curls clustering against Synfie's neck, "Patience, my sister." His warm hand closed over hers for a fleeting instant.

Synfie turned and tried to read the laughing eyes. What could this strange Romany know of her quest? He placed a barrage of cigarette smoke across his face by smoking furiously, and one more question remained unanswered.

One by one the men drifted away until only Lasho was left; then Synfie ventured a question: "Are you here for long?" hoping, yet dreading that he must soon go.

"Until camp breaks up in the fall. My *tan* is pitched far up the stream. And you?"

"As long as business is good. I promised some *gorgios* I would come to their camp Friday; perhaps you might care to go, also, since you, too, are a stranger the same as I. They pay well; MacManus is the name they gave."

Lasho frowned into the fire. Was it imagination that he had started at the name? It must have been, for he rose, saying, "It is well that I go; a Romany maid must not go to *gorgio* home alone. I will go with you and stay near."

SYNFIE was halfway up the trail to the MacManus lodge on Friday when the blond Jerry MacManus rode out and turned his horse beside her. "I thought I'd be in time to help you break camp," he said.

"Men never help a Romany maid," Synfie told him scornfully. "That is woman's work. But you may ride along; I like company." She well knew that at a safe distance behind Lasho rode his spirited black.

Here was a man she was permitted to admire and as they rode slowly through summer lanes knee-deep in bracken Synfie resolved to combat Lasho's attraction with Jerry's very evident admiration. Jerry was of her father's people and Lasho came from her mother's, and all her life Synfie's happiness had been shadowed by her mother's last act.

"I never knew a girl like you," Jerry said with a keen look at her face, for she was riding in silence, holding the fiery ponies to a jog trot between crowding birch and pine. "Most girls chatter madly and want a fellow to chatter back. You and I can have some fun if you stick around here this summer. I get horribly fed up on this house party stuff. Like me a little?"

Synfie laughed and shrugged. "Who can tell?" But she gave him a look out of the corner of her eye that was not discouraging. He drew his horse in closer and leaned down eagerly, but she eased up on the reins and the ponies dashed ahead.

"You won't always be in that wagon," he threatened, "and the place I've picked for your camp is away from the house."

"Indeed?" she murmured, some madness leading her on. Jerry was so sure of himself and life had been such a sad thing for so long.

Before them lay the lodge, a great log affair with big verandas. Beside a bubbling spring Jerry motioned her to stop and he dismounted. She tossed

the reins over a stump and sprang down into his arms. Before he could tighten his hold she slid free, and at a distance her dancing eyes and merry laughter mocked him.

"Go, I must set up my camp and build my fire else I'll have no time for *dukkerin* (fortune telling). Even a gypsy maid must eat."

"I can wait," Jerry said slowly, his face flushed and blue eyes cruel. Synfie thought of Peter the gypsy, who had been Athalie's sweetheart; his eyes looked as Jerry's did at that moment. No wonder Athalie had preferred Synfie's father.

Synfie put up the crimson tent and built a cartwheel fire that would last; then she went inside the tent and fastened the flaps and threw herself down on the cushions to think. Molly would be coming soon, out of curiosity, and she was not afraid Jerry would bother her now.

To escape from his eyes she sprang to her feet and began to dance

Before she knew it she was awakening from a deep sleep. She had not

meant to sleep, for her fire would be out; the shadows were long on the sides of the tent.

She donned her ceremonial gypsy dress and tied an orange scarf about her curly black head, then stepped briskly out. The fire burned brightly and two speckled trout lay beside it, wrapped in wet leaves.

On the knoll the big lodge was bright with lights; dinner was in progress. The fire lighted the dark trees and flashed on the crimson sides of the tent. Suddenly she felt terribly lonely and knew that no matter how hard she pretended, the blood of her father was stronger within her veins than that of her mother. She longed to be up at the lodge where, as John France's daughter, she had every right to be.

As she knelt beside the fire to lay the fish in the pan, from the blackness of the thicket a merry rich voice sang mischievously to the strum of a guitar:

"Wherever gypsies go
There the witches are, I know."

"Come out, Lasho," Synfie called naughtily, "and I will share with you the fish that the beeg Jerry caught." No longer did she feel lonely.

Lasho lounged gracefully into view, a scarlet handkerchief binding his dark head, a gayer one of many hues about his slim hips. "Some fisherman," he laughed, the slang falling oddly from his lips.

They smiled at each other in perfect understanding as to the identity of the fisherman; then Synfie returned to her cooking while Lasho leaned against a tree and sang:

"The wind whistles over the heath,
The moonlight flits over the flood
And the gypsy lights up his fire
In the darkness of the wood.
Hurrah!
In the darkness of the wood.

"Free is the bird in the air
And the fish where the river flows,
Free is the deer in the forest
And the gypsy wherever he goes.
Hurrah!
And the gypsy wherever he goes."

The firelight gleamed on his shining guitar and sparkled among the beads and bangles embroidered on his vest, but missed the dark handsome face. An odd carved ring set with a great winking diamond flashed on his slim brown hand.

"Sit and eat," Synfie invited briefly.

"I ate while you slept, lazy one; besides I like not your light. This is not new ground to me and I care nothing about being seen by your big Jerry."

Synfie's heart sank. She had been a fool to think that Lasho was an exception. "You perhaps coaxed away a horse?" she asked, thinking of the handsome black that he rode.

"Who knows?"—that maddening gypsy phrase. "But were he to see me I might never return to your camp again."

Then it was more than horse stealing and Synfie sickened of the gay, heedless rovers to whom the matter of spiriting away a horse, a purse or a life was a mere nothing. She would wipe this gay wanderer from her life—how quickly he had crept into it. Already the thought of his going hurt her.

"You need not stay. I'll do well enough alone," she said curtly.

"Alone?" he mocked, seizing her hands in a hard grasp and bringing his face so close that his warm cheek brushed her. "Six times while you slept the blond man came and went away again with a long face."

"Perhaps his face will not always be long," Synfie said, her heart pounding

heavily because of the face against hers and her inability to free herself.

Lasho's eyes blazed and he bent closer, his grasp on her wrists painful. He crushed her mouth under his in a cruel kiss that blazed and burned and made her mouth hurt long afterward.

"I dare you to like a *gorgio's* pallid kiss after that," he raged, then dropped her wrists and stepped backward with a single whispered warning, "*Gorgios.*"

SYNFIE tried to still the trembling of her hands, to compose her face so that the newcomers should not guess the turmoil within her. Molly had with her a girl so beautiful that Synfie's heart stopped for an instant. She was a story book princess with wide gray eyes and lovely golden hair that fitted her head like a metal cap. The girl looked frowningly at the gypsy girl, aversion showing plainly on her face; then she saw Lasho watching her. He smiled as she noticed him and bent his head in a graceful salute. Without another glance at Synfie the girl walked over to him.

"What's your name?" she asked breathlessly.

"Lasho, and what is yours?"

"Camelia France."

Synfie had been right. She bent over Molly's chubby fingers, the silver she had given her spilling out onto the ground. Camelia's coming had been foretold by Prima not two nights ago, and fight as she might against the superstitions of her mother's race, they lurked near to rise and confound her at times like this.

Synfie wove a correct past for the wide-eyed Molly, and a fanciful future; then Camelia came forward indifferently, breathing a trifle fast from her talk with Lasho. How well Synfie knew the breathless feeling his merry impudence gave one! The slashing wit and daring words, backed by the flash of his warm black eyes and the twist of his scarlet mouth.

She held out her hand indifferently, a silver dollar on its pink palm and Synfie faced her across it and from her too recent hurts drew words that brought fear into her eyes and pallor to her cheek.

"Your life line is crossed by the Romany patrin, sister," Synfie began, and ignored the start Camelia gave. "Even the heart line says that you will suffer through a gypsy, as your family has made the gypsy suffer. Look out for the gray-haired man who limps; he will bring you sorrow. I see a lonely Romany maid cross the sea because of you—there are two graves between this maid and your family—there is also much gray fog which says you must not know what lies beyond. You will love a black-eyed man. I am sorry, but there is no good fortune in that hand, only a lonely old age." Synfie drew back suddenly and shuddered. Perhaps it was the crimson glow from the tent, but her white fingers had looked red. "I see blood on your hands," she finished, shivering.

Camelia snatched away her hand and rose. "Come, Molly, I like not your gypsy. You know I have good cause to hate them—some of them," she amended, looking back at Lasho, invitation in her sleepy eyes.

He did not obey the invitation, but came forward and threw himself down beside Synfie, resting his head against her skirt.

"Well done, sister, but what a fortune to tell a pretty girl! Could you not have told her a pleasant one? *We* know that *dukkerin* is all bosh."

"I thought so, too, but to-night—

her hand—I can't explain it. I guess I'm nervous." Synfie shivered, busily digging a grave in the sand for the silver Camelia had given her.

Lasho's hand closed over her trembling ones and stayed there even after he apparently slept. Synfie looked at him, her eyes troubled. Even in sleep he twisted her heart. Long, black lashes swept his smooth, brown cheek, and his mouth had an impudent, arresting smile. Where his shirt was open at the throat the tip of a jagged scar showed, souvenir of some long-ago Romany battle. Oh, he was Romany from his black head to his graceful heels. She snatched her hand away, went inside and fastened the flaps and wished that she could fasten up her heart against him the same way.

MOTORS were arriving from the summer places scattered through the northern country. A band crashed into music under a canopy, and dancers in exotic costume drifted into step.

Synfie was busy, for the gypsy camp was a favorite spot with the merry-makers. Camelia passed, and Lasho joined her, and she fastened a velvet mask over his eyes and dragged him away to dance with her.

Jerry came at last and took Synfie away to dance, and she went gladly, curious to know what had become of Lasho. Jerry held her too tightly, and Lasho was not in sight, so she demanded to return to her camp. As they passed the last light she saw Camelia and Lasho disappearing into an unlighted rustic summerhouse. It had not been her plan that the dark-eyed man in Camelia's life should be Lasho—then Synfie remembered her own fortune was at stake. She could not marry a Romany.

Jerry returned unwillingly to his guests, and Synfie had scarcely seated herself beside her fire when a timid step made her rise. A little white-haired lady stood there, one of Jerry's twin aunts. As Synfie turned the old lady screamed.

"Why, you mustn't be afraid of me," the girl said gently.

"No, of course not. How silly of me! It was your resemblance to some one I knew long ago. Do you all look so alike?"

"Not at all. We are as unlike as you people. Let me get you a stool and maybe you will tell me about the one I resemble. I might even know her," Synfie said quietly.

"Don't get a stool. All my life I've longed to sit on the ground by a gypsy's fire, and my sister, who is five minutes older than I, won't allow it. She looks upon me as a mere infant," whimsically. "I am Miss Margie MacManus."

Synfie tried to conceal her eagerness as she waited for her guest to sit down. Miss Margie glanced quickly toward the lodge.

"It is too sad a story for young ears, perhaps, but years ago one of our young men married a lovely gypsy girl. Athalie was her name. I came to know her well, as our homes joined."

Synfie tried not to look too eager. She had been right to come back here where her mother had spent her summers. Perhaps her queer quest would end right here, and she might then run away from the too-charming Lasho; back to a world she knew little of but meant to know more.

"You will never know any of them, for all but one are dead. Two brothers visiting a gypsy camp found Athalie dangerously ill and brought her to the

hospital. Clay, the elder brother, would not even ride in the front seat with her, but his brother John held her in his arms all the way. He had her put into a private room and bought her exquisite clothes as she grew better. She was soon well.

"She was marvelously beautiful, and both brothers fell madly in love with her, but she seemed to have sensed Clay's first aversion.

"So she married John, and a baby was born. When this baby was a year old they gave a garden party like this one, and John let Athalie wear a gypsy costume. You see, he hated any mention of her past life, and would not let her have anything to do with any one from that past.

"I remember yet her almost unearthly beauty as she stood in her gorgeous gypsy dress between the two brothers, to receive her guests. Not one knew she had come to me not two days before to ask me what an American girl did when her husband's brother made violent love to her after marriage. I had weakly counseled patience, knowing the deep love John had for Clay. It would have killed him to know, and he was far from strong. I told her to be dignified—it was like trying to put out a flame.

"Much later in the evening I saw her and Clay walking down the lane, talking earnestly. Athalie was crying. Oh, if I had only rushed after her as I wanted to! But I didn't dare.

"Shortly after that the midnight train rushed across the high bridge and Clay came running in, exclaiming he had just seen Athalie and a gypsy man jump from the bridge to their death. They brought her in in the early morning, closely clasped in the arms of the handsomest Romany I ever saw.

"Clay's story was that he had seen Athalie run down the lane, and thinking she was in trouble, had followed her. He saw her go out on the bridge to meet the gypsy, and saw them trapped by the train. I always felt there was foul play somewhere because he had not run after her; he had been with her; but Athalie shielded Clay until death, so I kept still. John died soon after from shock, and Clay had a long illness from which he has never completely recovered. There, that is the story of the girl who looked like you. May your story be a happier one!"

"AND the gypsy Anselo in whose arms she died, did you know what he was to her?" Synfie panted breathlessly, grasping the little woman's arm so tightly it hurt.

Miss Margie stumbled to her feet, her face whitened as if by the slash of a whitewash brush. She caught Synfie's face between her trembling hands.

"I mentioned no Anselo!" sharply. "Who are you with John France's gray eyes in Athalie's face?"

"Some one you must have known as a baby. Some one who would give her life to know that her mother was good and true and did not have a secret lover. Oh, help me find out who this Anselo is, the secret Clay France has held these many years," Synfie begged, tears streaming down her face.

"She was good and true, little Cynthia, I know it! There's my sister calling me, drat her! I must see you again," fretfully from Miss Margie. "I can't see what Lorry Graham is about to permit you to stay here. He knows the terms of your father's will."

"He did not permit it. I ran away. You must keep the secret of my whereabouts for the love you had for my mother," Synfie commanded, and Miss

Margie knew then wherefrom this slim young girl had drawn the courage to invade a gypsy camp. Her sweet mouth was set and her gray eyes flashed.

Suddenly Synfie held up her hand for silence. Her quick ears had caught the brush of feet over the soft pine needles.

It was Jerry. "Hello there, Aunt Margie. You're due for one grand wigging. Aunt Marcia is on the war-path and Camelia has disappeared with your elusive companion, Synfie."

Synfie's heart sank to the heels of her red slippers. Of course Camelia, with her golden loveliness, would attract the dark Lasho. She managed to say indifferently, "She is quite safe with Lasho," but she was not so sure that he was safe with Camelia.

"Well, Aunt Marcia has never trusted any one since the gypsies robbed the lodge two years ago and carried off a valuable ring of mine that was set with a diamond worth a king's ransom," Jerry said heedlessly.

"You're quite sure it was gypsies that robbed you?" Synfie asked coldly.

"Well, I *am* a prize dub!" contritely. "But it's hard to think of you as a gypsy, Synfie. Now I suppose you're sore and won't do the robber dance you promised."

"I will ask Lasho when he returns. I cannot do it alone," Synfie said frigidly, and went into her tent and closed the flaps, the gypsy way of ending an argument.

"Come on back, Synfie," Miss Margie urged gently. "Jerry is sorry he was so thoughtless and I want you to tell me when I can see you again."

Synfie had meant to punish Jerry, not his aunt, so she ventured back into the firelight. In the distance she could see a slender impudent figure approaching, the errant Lasho.

Jerry saw him, too, and leaned forward. "That fellow looks deucedly familiar!" he exclaimed sharply.

"Impossible!" Synfie retorted, her heart hammering with fright. "He has but lately come from Spain; he is a Spanish gitano. The Romany men all look alike." But she could not help sending an appealing look at Miss Margie, for she had told her differently a short time ago.

"Quite right," Miss Margie said briskly, "as alike as peas in a pod. Come, Jerry, or Marcia will be furious at us both."

They went away and Lasho, who had disappeared as soon as he had noticed visitors about Synfie's fire, came out of the brush, smiling as at some pleasant thought. Synfie remembered that he had come from Camelia and it made her voice cold as she asked, "Shall you care to dance for the guests? He," nodding after the retreating Jerry, "seems to think he has seen you before."

"It is true that I have been around here before, but I don't think he'll recognize me as it is to be a Magyar dance and we'll be masked. He would know me if he saw my face," Lasho admitted coolly. A servant came and Synfie gave him a message, and very soon the music she had asked for came stealing through the pines. It was a wild dance she led the pursuing robber in and out of the trees, but it ended at last in her capture and held high in Lasho's arms she disappeared into the darkness.

"Set me down," Synfie demanded, as he still held her when they reached the camp fire's edge.

"What a prickly little thing it is," he drawled, looking down at the blur that was her face.

Synfie stiffened in his arms. "Let

me down!" There was no mistaking her anger, but he could not know the fright behind her words. Slowly he set her on her feet, then stooped and kissed the clustering curls against her neck.

"Let's get out of here, Synfie. There's no more silver to pry loose and they're all getting pretty wild for your clear gray eyes to watch. Besides, I don't like the way that blond *gorgio* looks at you."

Synfie managed an indifferent shrug, but truth to tell she was glad to break camp. It had all tired her; the meeting with Camelia, her uncle Clay's daughter, who heretofore had been merely a face in the illustrated Sunday papers that came to her Italian home; Miss Margie's rehearsal of the story of her mother that had been first whispered by the blue-eyed child at the American school. The story that had decided Mr. Graham and her uncle Clay, joint guardians of Athalie's child, to send her to Italy, her mother's land, to school where her youthful days might not be darkened by the old scandal.

When she returned to America Mr. Graham had told her the old story to arm the beautiful girl against gossip that would doubtless start when she was introduced to her peers. Instead of the effect he had expected, it had sent Synfie into the camps of her mother's people, determined to learn the real truth. She had refused so furiously to believe, that even Mr. Graham had wondered uneasily if Clay France's story had been true.

EARLY dawn was pinking the sky over the great slashings each side of the narrow trail as the ponies dashed toward camp. Lasho sat with Synfie in the wagon, his horse tied behind. He did not talk, and the girl's thoughts were too unhappy. When camp was reached Lasho went quickly away toward his tent and wearily she set up hers and turned the ponies loose, reflecting that Jerry would have helped her, but Lasho, being true Romany, had not seen her need. Prima's snores came lustily from the other tent. No American ideas about chaperonage troubled her head. So rigid are Romany ideas about morality that she never thought about the impropriety of leaving Lasho and Synfie to drive home alone in the dawn. Never could either wear again the beloved green did they overstep the gypsy law, lax as it looked to white people.

Into the muddle of Synfie's life crept another factor: Chivo, the knife man, the queen's own nephew and Britta's sweetheart. At first he but followed Britta to Synfie's fire, but fickle Romany that he was, he soon let Britta go back to the queen's camp alone, while he outsat every one save Lasho. Everywhere that Synfie went she could see his fiery eyes watching her.

Chivo and Peter, her mother's former suitor, were close companions, sharing the same camp. As she watched them at her fire one night the thought came to Synfie that Chivo might know Peter's secrets; Peter had known Anselo in the old days. If she showed Chivo favor in return for that secret—She was anxious to get back to her father's people, but she could not leave until her mother's name had been cleared.

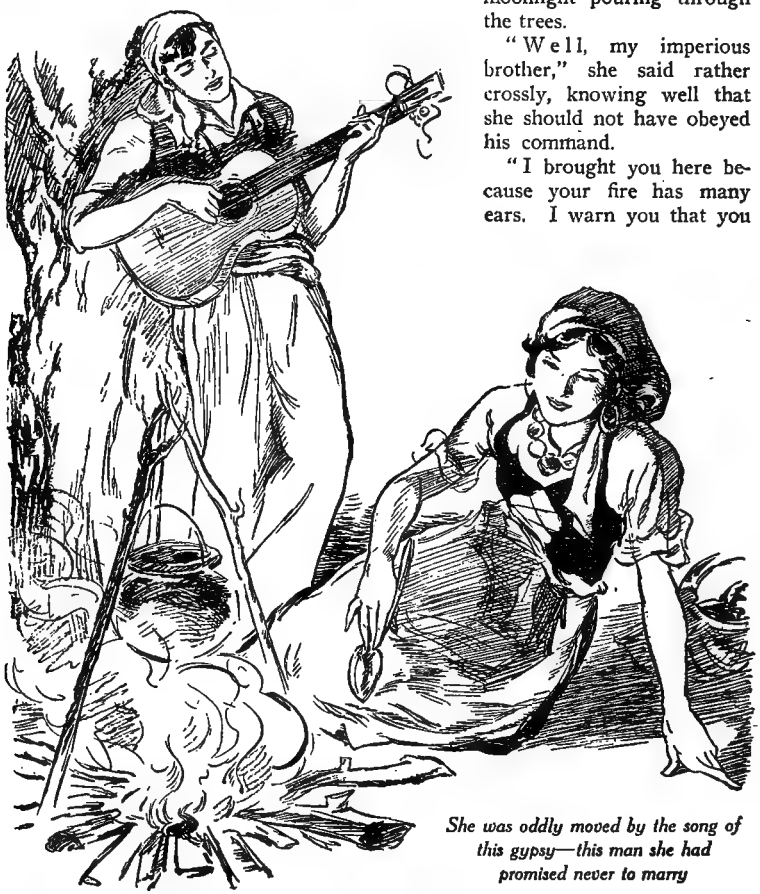
Lasho, leaning against the great pine that brooded over the tent, seemed to read her thought, for he moved over to her side and dropped down there. Chivo's eyes smoldered as the other man's nimble fingers built a patrin in the darkness that he could not read.

When he had finished Lasho rose and walked with Britta toward the queen's camp, and Synfie looked down and read what he had written, then brushed the whole thing into the fire and gave the signal for the group to disperse. Prima heaved her old bones up and into her tent, and when the last straggler had gone, Synfie melted into the shadows toward the fire-blackened pine where Lasho had fished for her that first day. He had told her to meet him there and she recklessly obeyed.

He waited, a slim shadow in the moonlight pouring through the trees.

"Well, my imperious brother," she said rather crossly, knowing well that she should not have obeyed his command.

"I brought you here because your fire has many ears. I warn you that you must not play with Chivo, for I should have to fight him, and since the big war I am a poor fighter. Besides, he fights with a knife, and you



She was oddly moved by the song of this gypsy—this man she had promised never to marry

would not care to marry a Romany who was all slashed up," he finished impudently.

"And who is marrying a Romany, *boro pappin?*" taunted Synfie. (*Boro pappin* may be a very loving term [big goose], or it may be an insult, and Synfie's tone was not loving because she was frightened.)

"You, little *saku* (swan), as soon as you have finished your work here," Lasho drawled softly.

Synfie looked into his dark face. How did he know that she was here for a special purpose? After to-night that purpose should rule her life. Only to-night was hers; after that Lasho must be put in his place ruthlessly.

"I doubt if Chivo would make a good husband," she murmured.

Lasho leaned forward and put his arm about her. "Now it is thou who are the *boro pappin.* The sooner you tell me why a Zingani stays in a mixed camp, the sooner I may help you, so we can marry."

Synfie stiffened in his grasp. "Let me go, Lasho," quietly. "It is no use to hold me; I have sworn never to marry a Romany."

His arm tightened until her heart beat in her throat, making her voice husky. She fought him, but he held her steadily, lifting her off the ground until his mouth was on hers. For a long, sweet moment she crumpled up against him and let her kisses answer his. It was all she might ever have of love. She knew now that it was love she felt for him.

Lasho sat her down gently. "There, now, my stormy petrel," he said, his voice ragged, "I have set my mark on your lips." She felt his fingers against her throat and knew that he was tying there his crimson scarf to tell the gypsy world that she belonged to him.

She put up protesting fingers. "I cannot marry you, Lasho—"

"Cannot or will not?" he asked amusedly, continuing with his task of love.

"Will not, then," defiantly. "I want to live in a house with my husband, who comes home at night tired from honest labor, not from trading horses or — stealing. I am tired of tents and filth and mosquitoes. Would you live with me in a house? No, you would not have the shadows made by the trees to hide in when Jerry comes looking for his stolen ring!" Purposely she hardened her heart and voice, conscious that she had almost forgotten the vow she had made to her guardian.

"At least wear my scarf," said Lasho lightly; "it becomes you well, and will guard you against the men in the camp. Only you and I will know that it means nothing. We will forget this mad hour when I thought you were mine. Perhaps the golden one at the lodge will be more kind, since you will have none of me, my Synfie."

Thus easily did he let her go and she stumbled back to her camp to sob the long hours away. It was typical of the gypsy, it seemed to her.

SYNFIE turned to Chivo in sheer defiance, careful always not to be with her alone. She wore Lasho's scarf no more, but laid it carefully away with her memories.

One afternoon when the camp was deserted, and Prima gossiped behind the queen's camp with the basket makers, Britta and Synfie walked among the trees some distance from the camp. Here it was they met Chivo, who took Synfie by the arm, saying imperiously, "Britta, I would talk with Synfie alone. Go back to the queen."

The other girl shrank back, wounded. She had loved Chivo so long. Synfie could not bear it, for she had come to have a warm affection for the little Britta, and she knew, in one blinding flash, that she could not go through with her plan to learn about Anselo through playing with Chivo. She put her arm about Britta defensively. "Say it before my friend," she ordered curtly.

But Britta jerked free and ran sobbing toward the camp, and Synfie faced the knife sharpener. "Say it, then, this thing you would wound your playmate and cousin to say to a stranger!"

"Not stranger," pleaded Chivo, robbed of his arrogance. "I but ask you to wear this," holding out his scarf.

She looked at the scarf, and seemed to see slim brown hands tying a scarf about her throat while moonlight poured through the blackened pine and silver birch—hands that shook a little as they touched her throat.

She shook her curly head. "If I wear any it is Lasho's," defiantly.

Chivo's eyes blazed. "You'll wear no man's but mine!" seizing her by the shoulders and attempting to wind his scarf about her throat.

Synfie struck at him, screaming, and as if by magic Lasho appeared from a side path. Chivo turned with relief to fight a man. They came together, Lasho silent, the other roaring.

Watching them swaying there, close clasped, Synfie suddenly remembered Lasho's remark that he was a poor fighter since the war. She looked them over critically. At least he was not afraid, though his opponent was big and burly. Lasho was tall but slenderly built; the struggle was cruelly unequal, though twice he threw Chivo.

Lasho's face was ghastly, and his shirt torn half off by the other's apelike hands. He went down, and Chivo's knife flashed as he bent over him. Synfie threw herself on Chivo's back, beating him with ineffectual fists, but he shook her off as though she had been a fly. He stooped, the knife shining in the sun, but it did not fall. He was staring, as if tranced, at the jagged scar on Lasho's breast. Not understanding at all why Chivo held his hand, but shaken with relief, Synfie watched him lift Lasho gently to his feet, a perfect torrent of Ramanes flowing from his lips, one word over and over that she could understand—*Prala*—which meant brother.

Lasho reddened and slapped Chivo's shoulder, saying something very low, and the two went away, leaving Synfie on the path alone. As they went, Chivo made a gesture of renunciation which the girl did not understand. It was all beyond her understanding.

FOR a week the MacManuses had been away attending a wedding, but Jerry was back, and every day he and Camelia rode to the camp together. Camelia did not go near Synfie's tent, but strolled up the stream toward Lasho's. Because of this Synfie was unusually kind to Jerry, and under the critical eyes of the camp he behaved himself very well, although his eyes smoldered as they followed her slim figure.

Synfie kept Britta or Prima with her constantly, and hated Camelia for the hours she spent alone with Lasho, idling under the birches near the stream where he fished interminably for the central fire's food. He bothered Synfie's fire no more, seemingly meekly taking her at her word. It puzzled her, for she had imagined that he would be a persistent and fiery suitor.

Girls were mad about Latin types, and she could not blame her cousin for admiring Lasho. Two races fought within Synfie, her mother's, which told her to marry Lasho and take what happiness it would bring, and her father's, which held her back.

Jerry showered silver right and left among the gypsies and won the right to stay by Synfie's fire as much as he wished. Prima was his enemy from the start. She sat in the doorway of her tent glowering when his hand strayed toward Synfie's, nodding when he smoked.

"It will soon be winter, my Synfie," he said one day without looking at her. "Wouldn't you rather have a lovely apartment than sleep in a tent?"

"Are you offering me marriage, Mister Jerry?" Synfie asked, feeding her fire bits of Norway. Then, as he was silent, a flush staining his cheek: "Your place here beside my fire is empty, do not come again." She went into her tent and closed the flaps.

Jerry flung himself away angrily, but she knew he would come back, for he was honestly in love with her. With Jerry as her husband she would be safe. She could keep her word to marry none save an American. Indeed, her father's will left her no choice. If she married a Romany, everything left by him went to Camelia; and Camelia had taken too much already. Synfie had decided to sacrifice love on the altar of Mammon.

The home her Uncle Clay had chosen for her in Italy lay on the edge of a permanent gypsy camp, though he well knew the provisions of his brother's will. Her other guardian, Mr. Graham, had not known this until he visited his ward when she was sixteen and found her a wild, unmanageable girl, more gypsy than white. The school in which he had placed her for two years had not wholly erased the ten years during which she had spent all her waking hours at the camp of her mother's people.

When Synfie refused to leave Italy he had told her of her father's will and pointed out the fact that she was playing into her uncle's hands by turning gypsy. Synfie was tractable after that, for the Romany strain made her long for revenge. She had meekly accompanied Mr. Graham back to America. Her uncle was in a sanitarium and Camelia was absent on a round of house parties, so Synfie had spent a quiet week in her guardian's home. If Mr. Graham had rid himself of Prima, Synfie would still have been with him; without an idea as to what steps to take to clear her mother's name.

This was the reason, although it seemed her heart was slowly being torn to bits, that Synfie had no idea of marrying Lasho or any other of her mother's people. She could not let her uncle finish the job he had started when she was a child, to turn her into a Romany with Romany tastes.

Jerry came back, as Synfie had felt sure he would, and begged her pardon sulkily, and each day as he became more devoted she tried to tell herself that in marriage with him lay safety for her and defeat for her uncle's scheme.

Synfie felt that never now would she learn the secret held by old Peter and her uncle as to the identity of Anselo. The old story would die, the old story that hurt no one but Synfie now.

Camelia made no secret of the hours she loitered with Lasho, either on the bank of the stream as he fished, or horseback. Sometimes they went driving in the long, low roadster belonging to Camelia.

The day came when Jerry forgot Synfie's race and gathered her into his

arms, kissing her over and over. Synfie lay quite still, for now she knew that her plans had all been madness—that never could she marry Jerry when every bit of her belonged to Lasho, fickle as he was.

She pulled herself free and ran into her tent to return with her guitar. Jerry stared and Synfie laughed. "Listen, I will sing you my answer; then you must go away and not bother me any more. Listen, my sulky one, to our wise songmaker, Alexandri:

"No horse will leave the prairie
For a harness with silver stars,
Nor an eagle the crags of the mountains
For a cage with golden bars.
Nor the gypsy girl the forest
Or the meadow though gray and cold
For garments made of sable
Or necklaces of gold."

She had chosen. Closed forever to her were the doors of her father's people if Lasho still wanted her. Even though he had turned his fickle love toward Camelia she couldn't go to Jerry as his wife. Always now the camps of her mother's people if Lasho wanted her; if he didn't she would have to hunt a substitute for happiness somewhere else.

Jerry pushed the guitar rudely out of her hands and seizing Synfie in his arms roughly covered her face with kisses. She submitted, limp in his arms, and he released her sulkily. She put herself at a safe distance.

"Go back to your own people, Jerry. If I married you it would be for a reason you do not know and you deserve better than that. What you feel for me is glamour—what would you do when I ran away to be with my people? How would you like it when a band of gypsies stopped your car to laugh and chatter with your wife? Go back and be glad I can be sensible."

And she left him so swiftly he could not follow.

She was going to Lasho and tell him bravely she had given up her hopes of living as Jerry lived, in a house. She was brave enough for that at last. She went softly, not sure he was alone, and he was not. Camelia, in the loveliest of lavender hues, idled at his side on a green bank while he lazily flipped a fly across the gurgling stream.

Synfie hesitated, holding her breath, for something in Camelia's face held her there, eavesdropper though she was. Something of desperation on that beautiful face.

"I go south next week, Lasho," she was saying.

"How sad Lasho will be," his soft voice answered, but he started reeling in his line.

"If I thought that were true I would urge you to follow," she said, her voice shaking.

"It is always sad for me when a lovely maid goes out of my life," Lasho continued softly, his brown hands busy with his case.

Camelia rose with an angry flounce. "So I am only another lovely maid in your life! I believe you love that hateful girl Jerry's so crazy about. Once I saw you kissing her."

"Who can tell?"—that cryptic gypsy phrase. "You are very lovely when you are angry, Camelia."

Camelia's anger vanished and she caught his arm. "I wish you thought so always, Lasho. Oh, you will not speak because I am rich. I have to do all the wooing—if you call sitting beside you wooing."

Lasho's face reddened and Synfie leaned forward shamelessly. She had to know before she offered herself to him as his wife; all her future life hung on his answer.

"A Romany once brought scandal into your life" (how had he known?). "Would you risk it again? We are not very faithful."

"I don't believe you wouldn't be faithful. As for that other, there was always some mystery about Aunt Athalie's death. My father said strange things in his delirium. I remember her a little because my own mother was dead and I hated my baby cousin because she had a mother and I had none."

"And you do not know who the gypsy was that died with her?" Lasho asked thoughtfully. Camelia shook her head as she looked into his face, her own sorely troubled.

He took her restless hands and held them firmly and Synfie tried to make herself go away and couldn't. She had to hear, shameless as it seemed. It meant life and death to her.

"Do you understand that if you really loved me, Camelia, and not the glamour, you would have to come to my world, not I to yours?" he asked in his beautifully soft voice. "Remember, there is very little romance from the inside; but very real is the dirt, and the flies; the begging and horse stealing. It is not always moonlight, and Silver Bowls are few. Sometimes there are prisons and swamps."

SYNFIE could not listen any longer. Camelia's face was so near as she drank in his words, so lighted by a love that seemed to take her outside her shallow, selfish self. Synfie turned and rushed back to her camp. It was time to go through the motions of making supper, though she felt that she could never eat again. Lasho loved Camelia or he would not have been so careful to point out the bad side of the life he loved.

Her fire was out, and Prima was off with the old crones. Synfie recklessly splashed alcohol over the pine splinters. It spattered on her bare arms; she did not notice, but lighted a match. Thus even in gypsy camps is firemaking modernized.

There was a crashing in the bushes. Was it a bear? Synfie backed toward her tent for the revolver she kept there.

Camelia crashed through the undergrowth, her hair down from its contact with the brush.

Straight to Synfie she came and towered over her, for she was nearly a head taller than her Romany cousin. The girls faced each other, Synfie sorely perplexed.

"If you will marry Jerry and let me have Lasho I will give you anything you like," Camelia gasped shamelessly.

"You would have to live on what Lasho earns, and he is very idle," Synfie answered slowly. Had Lasho sent the girl to ask for his release from any mythical bonds he might consider she held him in? "You could not make him happy—in a month he would sigh for the open road. There's no happiness where Romany and *gorgio* wed."

Camelia seized Synfie's arm and held it up. "You cheat, you! You're a white girl yourself, and have followed Lasho even as I have. Come, I will show him the real you under that stain, and then we will have an equal chance. I, at least, have never pretended to be of his race."

Synfie stared down at her arm where the alcohol had removed the stain. Gladly would she have gone to Lasho's camp, but suddenly she hated the thought of her cousin's humbling herself for any man. The France blood stirred in her veins, forcing her to protect her kinswomen against herself.

Forgetting that her own mother had gone to her death, perhaps through some madness of this girl's father, Synfie resisted her attempt to drag her to Lasho's camp. Then Camelia buried her long white fingers in her cousin's curly black hair, with the idea, Synfie knew, that it might be a wig. The long black curls tumbled out of the scarf and rained down upon Synfie's shoulders.

Murder blazed in Camelia's gray eyes as Synfie resisted her; then Synfie slipped on a stone on the edge of the brook and went to her knees. She had hesitated to scream and call down the wrath of the camp upon her cousin and now saw her mistake. The green gods of jealousy had deprived Camelia temporarily of sanity.

All her life she had taken what she wanted by merely reaching out her white hands, and Synfie alone stood between her and her desire. Her hands were at the throat of the hated rival.

Camp fire and crimson tent whirled madly. Dimly Synfie heard Britta screaming. The fire faded, leaving nothing but swirling grayness and a dreadful desire for sweet fresh air; then the merciless hands were wrenched loose and Camelia was thrown violently to the ground and Synfie knew nothing more.

HER name came to her faintly, said over and over in Lasho's voice, and she could feel his arms close about her. Forcing her wandering consciousness to return, she lifted heavy lids and smiled dazedly up at him. She saw Camelia, still on her knees, creep forward and then shrink back as Lasho lifted his face and looked at her. Stark hatred blazed from his black eyes and he hid Synfie's face from the other girl's sight against his breast. They were two Romany lovers, and Camelia was an alien. She faded from sight into the gray fog that was rising from the lake and veiling the pine woods.

Lasho lifted Synfie. "This damned nonsense is going to stop! Do you hear me, Synfie? I've waited long enough for you to come to your senses!"

"I am sorry, Lasho," she said very low. "I am ready to marry you whenever you say. Will—will you stay and have supper with me?" For the light in his eyes was dangerous.

"Try to drive me away!" roughly. He set her on her feet with a little shake, pulled off the scarf he wore about his hips and tied it very firmly under her chin. Then he took her by the throat and set the betrothal kiss on her lips and forehead.

A little sob shook her and he looked down at her sharply. "You aren't sorry?"

She put her arms about his neck bravely and hid her face against his shoulder. "No. It was because I thought I'd lost you forever, and now I want to cry from gladness."

Lasho laughed softly and lifted her face. "I like salty kisses," he whispered, and with his mouth chased the single tear down her cheek to the hollow of her throat, then captured it and placed it on her lips and forgot the reason for his lips being there, to use them for quite another purpose.

Britta danced happily about, running in and out of Synfie's *tan*, bullying Prima into building the fire until it blazed high, running into the woods for more fuel and dragging the delighted Prima with her, while Lasho leaned against a tree, his eyes never straying far from Synfie's face.

All around their little world the fog

swirled, wreathing the birches in white veils. Synfie's bed would be damp that night, but she did not mind. The silver of the birch trees gleamed eerily in the red glow of the tent and fire. She was glad that those she loved best were near her, for she was still shaken by the fright she had had.

A wild cry pierced the cheer of the scene and a man staggered into sight and knelt beside Synfie, who was on her knees turning a brace of squirrels on a spit. It was a gray man who limped, and she knew him at once as Camelia's father, though she had not seen him in years. He buried his face in her skirts, babbling.

"Don't go away again, Athalie. Give me a chance to tell John Anselo was only your brother. I've lived in torment, but I was mad about you and jealous of John's memory of your pure love."

Synfie looked down at him in amazement as he toppled sideways and fell unconscious. He had taken her for her mother. Afterward they learned that he had heard of Camelia's mad infatuation for a gypsy and come in search of her. He had been lost and wandered hours until he blundered into sight of Britta's sky-reaching fire at Synfie's camp. He had never been strong since the death of Athalie and John, and the shock of seeing Athalie apparently alive had been too much.

"He's dead," Synfie gasped, shrinking against Lasho, who had hurried to her side.

Lasho put her gently to one side and knelt beside the man, listening to his heart, then shook his head. "Just fainted. I'll get Prima—she'll bring him around. Then we'll get him to the lodge."

He had just left when the hunt broke into the camp from the opposite direction. They had met Camelia and told her her father had been gone for hours searching her. Clay France opened his eyes and smiled wanly at his niece.

"I took you for your mother—now I know you must be Cynthia. No, don't stop me. I must tell your mother's story for I may not get another chance. Athalie came to me, crying bitterly—was it only seventeen years ago? Peter, a gypsy, had come to tell her her brother Anselo had returned from Italy and wanted to see her. John had forbidden her having anything to do with her old life and people.

"I did not tell her I knew that John would have welcomed her brother gladly. I swore her to secrecy, promising to help her meet Anselo without his knowledge, for I meant to use this later. I took her to the bridge to meet Anselo as he came from the depot, and the train trapped them. A thousand times I have tried, but lacked the courage to free my conscience by confession. Of all the world, only Peter the gypsy and I knew Anselo's identity.

"They laid Athalie on the porch and the water drip-dripped from her long black hair. I hear it always when the eaves drip—even the dripping of a faucet nearly drives me to madness."

CLAY FRANCE did not die. They carried him to the car. Camelia lingered behind for a moment—Synfie knew it was to look on Lasho for the last time. She had gained a fortune and home left Synfie by her father, but Synfie knew she would gladly have sacrificed it for the gypsy's love.

Synfie was crying softly for her gay young mother, sacrificed on the altar of an ungodly love, and Camelia took a

step toward her as if she would have comforted her. But even as she did so Lasho came out of the path followed by Prima, and knelt at Synfie's side, drawing her close.

He wiped away her tears and whispered love words against her lips.

"We will satisfy the *gorgio* part of you, my Synfie, by a civil marriage in town and for the Romany in us both we'll have the grandest wedding this old lake ever saw. Will your other guardian forgive you for marrying a gypsy, enough to come to the wedding?" he finished wickedly.

"He'll have to come, for there will be papers to sign over to Camelia. I would like the nice Miss Margie with me." Then Synfie lifted his hand that held the stolen ring. "Promise me you will—"

Lasho hushed her firmly. "My own! You will often be unhappy if such things grieve you. What is it but relieving the other half of too much wealth? Such as this ring?"

So Synfie kept silence though it showed her the gulf there would be between her life as Cynthia France and her future life as Lasho's Synfie. She wrote Miss Margie asking if she would meet her in town for the wedding, and she also wired Loring Graham, her guardian.

"Taking back my promise. Marrying Lasho, the Gitano, Wednesday. Bring papers prepared to turn the property over to Camelia who is here. Forgive and love me," and she signed it "Synfie," for she was putting away the American spelling of her name with her dream of a house with a roof that was not of stars.

It was Lasho who met Loring Graham at the train while Synfie went to the inn to meet Miss Margie and a very nervous justice Lasho had found.

Miss Margie was overjoyed at Synfie's happiness, yet a little sad and human too, that Clay France had won after all. When Lasho and Mr. Graham entered the inn, Miss Margie blushed rosy red at the sight of the short fat man who was strangely silent as he kissed Synfie.

To the intense indignation of Miss Margie the justice mumbled through the brief ceremony. When Mr. Graham went away with the justice Miss Margie drew Lasho anxiously aside.

"Was he dreadfully angry about your marrying Synfie?"

"He swore like a pirate," laughed Lasho, his black eyes sparkling. "I can't blame him and say, he tells me you two used to be sweethearts, only a cruel sister interfered."

Miss Margie blushed harder than ever. She had already confided to Synfie that she had been engaged to Loring Graham when they were very young and he was poor, and Miss Marcia had stormed so she hadn't dared defy her and marry for love; so Loring Graham had married some one else and later amassed great wealth.

In Synfie's wagon the four drove out to camp; it was in gala attire for the wedding; a big tent with oiled silk sides was set close to Synfie's small one. Miss Margie stayed, daring her sister's wrath.

The last day of the merrymaking Synfie asked the lodge people to come, and even Clay France accepted. Synfie was uneasily aware that Jerry came merely to identify his ring and have Lasho arrested. He smarted because both Synfie and Camelia had preferred the gypsy.

The Silver Bowl's shores overflowed with gypsies. *Tans* from all over the country had been set up. Some one's money had flowed freely. Miss Margie

trotted about, bravely attired in a red courting scarf that Lasho had coaxed Mr. Graham into presenting. Synfie's guardian seemed thoroughly reconciled to her forswearing civilized life for Lasho and love.

Lasho was in the big tent when Jerry came to congratulate them. He looked about curiously. "Where is this Lasho? He is a regular will-o'-the-wisp," he grumbled. "Never giving me anything but glimpses of his back."

At that moment Lasho came out and Synfie went over and stood beside him defiantly. Jerry stared at her handsome husband standing there so arrogantly in the sunlight, stared and rubbed his eyes. Then he gave a great shout of laughter and caught Lasho by the shoulders.

"Lou Graham, you old fraud you! No wonder you kept out of my sight! Camelia, you'll have to marry me for sure now, because Synfie keeps her father's estate. This guy is an American. Heck! This takes the wind out of my sails!"

"Then I may keep my ring?" simpered Loring Graham's son, with nevertheless a keen look that read the depths of Jerry's petty soul.

Jerry had the grace to flush and for a long moment the two men looked each other in the eyes. "But the one you gave me in exchange *was* stolen from the lodge last summer," Jerry said at last defensively.

Synfie stole away, unable to stand any more. Lasho was not a gypsy except as a student of Romany. He would hate the gypsy side of her in time. Mr. Graham had told her of his son Louis, but she had forgotten that Lasho is Louis in Romany.

Lasho found her where they had first met and turned her around, flicking away her tears with a slim, scornful finger. "Why did you run away?"

"It was all right when I was half *gorgio,* but you are all *gorgio* while I am half Romany," she tried to explain, her tears flowing faster.

"*Boro pappin,*" with loving scorn, "my mother was a Spanish señorita, but father never told you that, for their marriage was a tragedy, each loving some one else hopelessly. Ever since I was a little chap I've run away to be with the gypsies. The old crones taught me to speak true *Ramanes;* Chivo and I were great pals until he almost killed me one day teaching me to use the knife, then mother took me away. I knew him at once but he did not know me until he saw the scar he had given me.

"When dad wrote that you'd run away I had no trouble picking up your trail. You had always interested me and I meant to look you up as soon as you were grown; then when I found you I wanted you to love me in spite of yourself, because of course I knew all about your father's will. Happy now, my Synfie?"

Shadows were growing long around the Silver Bowl before the two struck camp and rode away into the sunset.

It wasn't much fun, after working all day, to come home and slave in the kitchen, too

The Way to a Man's Heart

By ANN SUMNER

"CONNIE dear, will you powder my back?"

"Connie, I forgot the bottled dressing—why don't you make some? Yours is so much better!"

"Conneeee! I forgot to fix the run in those nude stockings, and I've only the one pair. Would you mind, darling?"

The last cry came from the bathroom, where sounds of Roberta splashing about in the tub brought visions to Connie of a damp and mussed room when the guests arrived.

When four business girls share the expenses of an apartment, the individual outlay is much less than if each lives alone. You get so much for your money, thought Roberta Morley, Madelyn Jennings, and Flo Horton. As for Connie—Constance Louise Bartlett — all her life, it seemed, she had been lonely until one miraculous morning Roberta had asked her if she wanted to make a fourth with herself and two friends and take over the lease on a really lovely apartment. Now she was never lonely.

Connie, it turned out, was the only one of the four who knew how to cook; the only one who could plan and serve the delicious suppers which made the apartment a delightful rendezvous for a crowd of young people.

But Connie's usefulness at a party ceased after supper was prepared. Deft with light-as-air biscuit dough, she was awkward with men. A wizard at angel food cake, she went through agonies of embarrassment if left alone for

five minutes with a strange young man.

It amused Roberta and Flo and Madelyn immensely.

Roberta worked for the same firm as Connie; that was how they first met. As secretary to the sales manager of the great firm, Roberta was an efficient, mechanical young person by day. By night she bloomed forth, substituting soft chiffons for her smart daytime black and white. Her "dates" were numerous and devoted.

Flo, on a minute allowance from a family somewhere in the Middle West, attended art school and did commercial bits to help out on the side. Red-haired, flirtatious, she drew admirers rivaling Roberta's in numbers.

Tall, alluring Madelyn was constantly in the throes of the affair which was, at last, "the real thing," but of which she soon tired. However, with her it was always one man at a time, so that her attendants did not fill the apartment to overflowing as did those who flocked in the wake of Flo and Roberta. Madelyn was the valued stand-by of Mme. Alphonsine's Atelier on the Avenue.

Connie — well, Connie had Jack Merritt. She had never asked him to the apartment. She couldn't have said exactly why, but perhaps it was because he knew such fascinating things to do for her, such interesting places to take her. He took her to smart little restaurants where the food was deliciously concocted, and even Connie couldn't have told you half the ingredients. It was a relief not to be familiar with the concoction of one's meals now and then.

Jack Merritt worked for the firm, too, although Connie rarely met him there. He had something fairly important to do with the financial end of things, and she had happened to meet him because, on one stormy day when the market was doing things to the firm's stock, he had rushed, wild eyed, into the chief's office where Connie was going over some certificates with her employer.

"Miss Bartlett—Mr. Merritt," the chief had grunted from one to the other. "Take care of you when we settle this mess, Merritt."

So Jack had waited until they were through, wandering restlessly about the chief's office and watching Connie when he thought she wasn't looking. He had taken her to lunch in the middle of that hectic day, and from then on they were good friends.

TO-NIGHT was a very special occasion.

A week or so previously Roberta had received a letter from her mother asking her to be kind to one Ronny Martin, son of a dear friend of hers, who with his mother had come to New York to live. Mrs. Martin had called Roberta, and Roberta had dined with the newcomers from the West. She had returned singing loudly the praises of Ronny Martin to her roommates.

"Tall, my dears, and blond! Blue eyes, but he-man just the same! And can he dance? And can he play a uke and croon to it? If I hadn't met Johnny first—"

"You're not going to take possession!"

Flo was aghast.

"Not unless I weaken or Johnny and I quarrel. You three can fight it out among you. Don't say I'm not a generous roommate! I've asked him to come up Wednesday night. We'll get a crowd together, and Connie can make us that swell fruit salad and

chicken à la king. We'll have dark Maisie come in to serve. Make it real swanky. What do you say?"

That had been Monday.

To-night was Wednesday.

Connie powdered Madelyn's back, mentally disapproving of such a low-cut gown for home wear. Then she snatched up Flo's stocking and deftly ran an expert needle up the little rift in the sheerness of the hose. Dressed herself, in a gown that was new and had been too expensive, according to Flo and Madelyn, who thought it quiet, she glanced with satisfaction at her image in the mirror. Quiet, perhaps, but distinctly nice! She started for the kitchen.

Black Maisie was already there, but Connie knew and distrusted of old her salad dressing. She glanced at the kitchen clock. It was eight, the guests would be drifting in soon. Still, she was all dressed. Might as well mix up some mayonnaise—it was too late for anything else.

Deftly she shook salt, pepper and paprika into the bottom of the yellow bowl; then oil, vinegar—more oil; beat it briskly.

Maisie was standing on a stool, bringing from an upper shelf their large punch bowl.

"Careful!" warned Connie, but it was too late. Maisie, swaying as the stool shook, jumped for the floor. She saved the punch bowl, but swung an elbow outward, knocking over the yellow bowl of dressing, leaving an oily yellow streak down the front of Connie's gown.

Aghast at the result of her clumsiness, she murmured over and over again, "Ahs so'y, Miss Connie; Ah's so so'y," while she dabbed ineffectually with a kitchen towel at the wreck of the new gown.

Connie, who thought she might cry if she tried to reply, said nothing, and started down the hall to her room.

Here Roberta, her head emerging through masses of pale green chiffon, stared at the ruined gown.

"Connie! What on earth?"

"Maisie knocked a bowl of mayonnaise over on me," Connie explained briefly.

"Oh, honey! And the dress new! Really, this is the last time—"

"I shouldn't have worn it into the kitchen. Anyhow, it will come out, I suppose."

"Probably. But the first night you put it on. Gee! Well, better get into your black crape—they'll be here any minute."

"Can't. Sent it and the pink to the cleaner's this morning. I thought as long as I had this now—and they both needed it, badly. I think I'll go to bed. I don't know any one who's coming—"

"You'll do nothing of the sort!" Roberta raised her voice to their customary tone of conversation with the inmates of the other bedroom.

"Flo! What you wearing to-night?"

"The yellow," Flo's shrill echo came.

"Come in here—and bring your aquamarine!"

"Right away, dear."

"Now," said Connie, "I won't wear any one else's clothes."

"Don't be silly! The rest of us do it all the time. Only way to keep well-dressed! Anyhow, you've got to do it to-night—you'll look yummy in Flo's aquamarine. You're built along the same lines."

Flo came in then, bearing the gown.

"You—you're sure you don't mind, Flo?" Connie asked.

"Goodness, no! Anything you want, honey."

Connie flushed with gratitude. Even after six months of companionship, after two years of lonely boarding house existence, she hadn't got used to the easy camaraderie of her companions.

She pulled off the ruined frock.

"Take off that slip, too," commanded Roberta. "That's a slinky dress in spite of its innocent look."

Standing revealed in shorts and brassière, Connie was doubtful.

"Miss Bartlett, may I present our new manager?" Thus informally Jack Merritt walked into her life

"You—you're sure you can't see through it?"

"Silly! Stand still. I'll pull it over your head."

When it was on, Roberta wouldn't let her look in the mirror until she had powdered the back of her neck and her arms and had carefully rouged lips and cheeks.

"But you know I never wear paint!" Connie protested.

"Don't say paint! It sounds so abandoned," said Roberta with a giggle, as she stood off and surveyed her handiwork. "Say, I'll bet you steal old Ronny from those two in there!"

"No chance!" answered Connie, but after she had taken an unbelieving peek in the mirror, she wasn't so sure.

The bell rang, and she heard Flo and Madelyn walking down the hall, but waited while Roberta ran an expert lipstick over her own lips.

Then they went in.

JOHNNY McCARTHY was there, and took immediate possession of Roberta. Bob Nichols, Madelyn's man of the moment, arrived with another couple, and behind them came two good-looking youngsters who were in Flo's classes at the art school.

Then two more couples, friends of Roberta's, whose party it really was.

Then Ronny Martin.

In every way he lived up to Roberta's enthusiastic advance notices. He *was* tall, *and* blond, *and* blue-eyed, *and* talented.

"God's gift to women!" hissed Bob Nichols when Ronny came in. "Don't let me catch him making eyes at you, Madelyn, or there'll be trouble!"

The party progressed, and the handsome visitor showed no signs of preferring the company of any one of the hostesses in particular. Undoubtedly he scored the success of the evening with his singing—every bit as good as Rudy, my dear—and lived up to Roberta's description of him as a good dancer.

It was during supper that Connie, who was having an unusually good time with one of the art students who wanted to paint her in the aquamarine dress, saw Ronny rise from Roberta's side and come toward her.

Quite deliberately he settled himself at her side.

"Roberta tells me you made the chicken à la king," he said. "I didn't dream any one but my mother could make it like that!"

"Better than mother used to make!" inserted the young art student, with bad grace. He didn't like being cut out by the superior being who was the guest of the evening.

Ronny Martin ignored him, and devoted himself entirely to Connie — a process which lasted the remainder of the evening.

He told her all about how he had landed the partnership in his firm, which had sent him to New York. He complained about New York; he and his mother had a nice enough apartment, but they hadn't been able to bring along their old cook and his mother wasn't able to make all the good things they had enjoyed at home in St. Louis.

When the party was over and the last of the noisy participants had departed, the four hostesses held the usual post mortem over the evening's affair.

There was no doubt that Connie had captured the important guest of the evening.

"It was my dress," claimed Flo. "I really ought to have a half share in him, Connie."

"Nonsense! After I told him she concocted the chicken, she could have worn a Mother Hubbard for all he'd have noticed, but you did look like a million, Connie dear. You should have stayed with Vin Rogers. He appreciated it—wanted to paint you in it, he said."

"Well, she landed Ronny, hook,

line and so forth," said Flo. "Dates, Connie?"

Connie nodded. Of course it had been the dress. Mentally she planned a new wardrobe along the lines of Flo's taste. Also, she must see what shades of rouge and powder Roberta had combined. It was thrilling to have the lion of their party attracted to herself—with Madelyn and Flo obviously setting out to capture him!

"He's coming to dinner to-morrow night. You all don't mind, do you? I'll get dinner. We're going to the movies afterward."

"Fast work! No, we don't mind. I don't, anyhow. It's my week for the cooking, and that's one night off," said Madelyn jubilantly.

Ronny came to dinner, had two helpings of everything from Connie's delicious lamb roast to her frozen custard. Then they went to the movies. When they came back they found Roberta and Johnny there, and the four of them ate up a week's supply of cookies Connie had made when she came home from the office.

Ronny continued his attentions, and there was no doubt of their seriousness. He came to dinner at least once a week, sometimes oftener, after his mother went back to their home for a necessary settlement of their affairs. Nobody minded—it meant that whoever was on kitchen duty that week got a welcome night off, for Connie always cooked the dinner when Ronny was coming.

Connie was blooming out.

She negotiated successfully with Flo for the aquamarine gown. She added two shades of lipstick, rouge and powders for afternoon and evening to her dressing table accouterments. With her new clothes she captured the jaunty air that, while modeled on Roberta's, was a new and fascinating manner all her own.

Ronny was fascinated, and made no secret of his interest.

At the office, too, they noticed things, and if it hadn't been for Ronny's continual rush, Connie could have accepted many an invitation. But Ronny was all that mattered. Even Jack Merritt's attentions, once prized so highly, she avoided.

Then one night, while she and Ronny were seeing the newest Garbo film, Jack called at the apartment.

Roberta, who was home alone, welcomed him. She felt as though she knew him, for although they had never met, his voice had been heard regularly over their telephone several times a week. Usually Connie was out—with Ronny. Or she couldn't go with Jack because, in order to be out so much with Ronny, she had to stay home once in a while to take care of her clothes and do lots of little things, didn't she?

Jack liked Roberta, and being very miserable, and scenting sympathy, he asked her almost immediately:

"Connie got a date?"

"Yes."

"She—she's hardly ever in lately, is she?"

Roberta liked him, and felt sorry for him, but there wasn't anything she could do to console him, and presently he left, disconsolately.

Before he left he told her the news he had been keeping for Connie's ears—that on the first of the month the chief would make formal and public announcement that he, Jack Merritt, was now the fourth vice-president of the firm. The first of the upper rungs of the ladder he was climbing. But, perhaps Connie knew already, and didn't care.

That night Connie came home wearing a very small diamond on the third finger of her left hand.

Every one was home by that time, and they toasted Connie and Ronny ("Doesn't it sound cute and rimish!") with ginger ale, and the bridegroom-to-be celebrated the glorious occasion by eating three generous slices of Connie's angel food cake.

Roberta told Connie about Jack's visit, and fancied that she saw a fleeting light of regret in her roommate's eyes, but she couldn't be sure.

THE next day was Friday. Connie was to have dinner with Ronny and Mrs. Martin, who had just returned from her visits, at their apartment.

The chief was unusually biting that day. He was leaving that night for a week's trip to Chicago, and undue pressure of work at the office was threatening to make him cancel the trip. He stormed and he fumed. Connie rushed here and there to satisfy his wants, succeeded in calming him down, making rash promises as to her own ability to take care of all the leftovers, and finally saw him disappear in the wake of the office boy who was taking his grips down to his waiting car. It was to emergency hours like this that Connie owed her excellent salary and the reputation of being the first secretary who could, or would, cope with the chief's wicked temper. Usually, after one of his turbulent days he apologized, complimented her on her evenness of temper, and added five or ten dollars to her monthly check.

To-day, with a hectic eight hours' work behind her, and the probability of a strenuous morning ahead, Connie sighed with relief when the time came for her to close her neat, orderly desk. She looked forward to dinner at the Martin apartment.

It would be nice to have some one prepare her meal to-night. It was nice not to have to stop on the way home for meat, vegetables or something for dessert. Of course it was always flattering to have Ronny insist that he simply couldn't stand restaurant food when he thought of her luscious biscuits. But, with the weather getting warmer every day, it hadn't been exciting to stand over a hot stove after a hard day's work, no matter how much your concoctions were appreciated. And when Ronny came, with increasing frequency, to dinner, the three other girls gave her a wide berth in the kitchen.

She found the Martin apartment easily enough. It was on the fifth floor, and should, thought Connie, as the elevator whisked her upward, be cool—even breezy.

Mrs. Martin met her at the door.

It was easy to see where Ronny got his blond good looks. His mother was very pretty, and looked a little spoiled on account of this very prettiness.

She looked at Connie, when she had ushered her into the living room, as though making up her mind about this girl who was to be her daughter-in-law.

"I—I'm sure you will make my Ronny happy," she said.

Ronny wasn't home yet, wouldn't be for half an hour or so. Connie removed her hat and coat, hung them in a tiny closet, and rejoined her hostess in the cool living room. How tired she was!

She sank into the softness of the room's one davenport.

Mrs. Martin glanced at her watch.

"Nearly six! And I haven't a thing started for dinner. Don't you want to come out and help me? Ronny will be so pleased to find his womenfolk together like that! He's so domestic — but I suppose you've found that out!"

Connie sighed at the thought of a hot kitchen, but rose and followed Mrs. Martin down the narrow hall to the kitchen. There was a steak, large and juicy as Ronny liked them, in the electric refrigerator. There were materials for fruit cocktails, for salad, for dessert. But nothing was prepared.

"This little kitchen," Mrs. Martin complained. "Why, back home—"

"Oh, it's you!" she breathed. "I'm not doing a thing! Go out with you? Ask me and see!"

But Connie wasn't really paying any attention. She had heard all about that big kitchen "back home" many times.

There really wasn't room for both of them to fuss around. They got in each other's way terribly. So Mrs.

Martin sat down on the kitchen stool while Connie prepared the steak, quartered the head of crisp lettuce, made Thousand Island dressing, and prepared the fruit for a cocktail. Mrs. Martin was impressed and complimentary.

Everything was practically ready when Ronny came home. Mrs. Martin, who had just completed setting the small table in the minute dining room, met him at the door, but generously did not accompany him to the kitchen.

When he entered, Connie was holding both wrists under the running cold water at the sink. It wasn't helping very much. She was still hot and very, very much bothered!

Ronny came up behind her, kissed the nape of her neck.

"Oh, my sweetheart. It—it's good to see you here. When we're married it will be like this every night! I'll come home to find you waiting for me. Won't it be wonderful?"

Dutifully Connie returned his kiss, but made no reply.

"I'll run in and wash up, darling, and we'll eat right away," said Ronny, and left her.

Connie stood very still for a moment after he had gone.

His words echoed and reëchoed through her brain. Like this every night—wonderful! Every night! Hot nights—at the end of long, hot days—

MRS. MARTIN appeared at the door.

"I'll run in and powder my nose, dear. Ronny always likes to see me looking fresh and nice at the table. I'd better change my gown, too. You won't mind putting on the cocktails—with a little ice?" She disappeared down the hall.

For the first time since she had met Ronny, on the night of Roberta's party, things clicked correctly in Connie's brain.

Like a motion picture, the future—with Ronny—appeared. Years and years—in the kitchen—grilling thick, juicy steaks—quartering heads of lettuce—meals, meals, meals for Ronny. They said the way to a man's heart was through his stomach—an inelegant but exact description of the only route to Ronny's heart. How foolish to suppose that the aquamarine dress and its successors—the new rouge—had been responsible. She hadn't become a new, a different girl, who had snared Ronny because of a new-found appeal. No, she had been the same old Connie—dumb, perhaps, but a good cook! And a good cook was what Ronny needed in a wife, all that Ronny needed.

Swiftly she wiped her hands on a kitchen towel. Sounds of Mrs. Martin's humming came softly through her door as Connie listened carefully. There were also sounds of splashing water from the bathroom.

With a grin Connie slipped back to the kitchen, lit the gas over the steak in the grill, took two well-filled sherbet glasses from the ice box and put them in place on the dining room table. All was ready for the diners—for two diners. At the third place she laid the little diamond ring. That was all. Perhaps between them they would see the light—would understand; perhaps they wouldn't. It didn't really matter.

She crushed her little white sports hat over her hair, took her white coat in her arm, and softly opened the hall door. She walked down one flight before she rang the elevator bell. She wasn't taking any chances now.

And when she got downstairs, quite extravagantly she hailed a taxi.

The ride home, with all the windows down, was gloriously cool and refreshing.

Roberta was preparing to go out to dinner with Johnny.

"Thought you were going to Ronny's for dinner," she said.

"Changed my mind," said Connie, pulling off the little white hat.

"Better fix yourself some dinner. You'll be the only one home to-night. There's some fruit in a covered dish in the ice box—"

"Ice box! Kitchen stoves — dingbust them! I never want to step inside a kitchen again as long as I live," Connie burst forth, and then she gave way to the pent-up storm. From it Roberta learned much. She proffered her eau de cologne and best face powder and comforted her raging friend as best she could. Then, while Connie was bathing her hot, flushed face, Roberta slipped hastily down the hall to consult the telephone book. Jack Merritt, she thought, lived at the University Club—

Ten minutes later Johnny came for Roberta. He couldn't understand why she had to keep him waiting.

Then the telephone bell rang.

Connie answered, and, to Johnny's amazement, Roberta stood still and, quite frankly eavesdropped. He couldn't understand it — only Connie getting a date.

Her voice came clearly from the hall.

"Oh, Jack!"

"Fine! No, just busy . . ."

"Oh, no! You mustn't think that! . ."

"Not a thing! . . ."

"Love to! The roof! Perfect! I'll be ready."

The receiver clicked.

Connie, humming lightly, ran toward her bedroom.

"Date, darling?" Roberta called, just as though, Johnny thought, she didn't know it.

"With Jack Merritt — a cool roof and real restaurant food!" sang out Connie's voice.

Then Roberta was ready to go.

"Imagine," Johnny remarked, as he held the door open for her, "Connie seeing anything in bum restaurant food when she can cook like nobody's business! Still, I suppose a girl can get tired of hanging over a hot stove on a hot night, cooking for a guy, even if he does look like a movie hero."

"A girl can, and Connie has," said Roberta sententiously. "Which is a lucky break right now for a perfectly darling young man named Jack Merritt."

She sat up, too excited to sleep. Here was her chance for revenge

Cast Aside

By RUBY M. AYRES

ROGER BUCHANAN, visiting at Newquay, overhears Cecelie Vanstone, a poor girl, tell her friend Kathy that she thinks Roger a snob. "I'd love to meet him, make him fall, and then tell him what I really think of him!" she says. Roger does meet her, and they fall in love with each other. Philip, Roger's brother, and Louise, his wife, recognize in Rosa Desmond, a dancer, Roger's wife, whom for ten years he had thought dead. Roger decides to tell Cecelie that he made a fool of her in revenge, since he can't marry her. He meets the girl that evening on a cliff beside the sea.

Roger tells Cecelie of the overheard conversation, and pretends that he could not think of marrying out of his class. The girl is hurt to the heart, and she and Kathy go back to New York. There Templeton Vanstone, Cecelie's father, returns from abroad a rich man and establishes her in a good hotel with plenty of money and beautiful clothes.

Roger sees them dining together, and is greatly upset. His jealousy is aroused and he wishes he had told the girl the truth.

Vanstone is killed in an automobile accident, and Geddes, Cecelie's lawyer, insists that she have a chaperone. He

advises that she become a paying guest of Louise Buchanan, whom Cecelie hates.

CHAPTER XVIII

MEANS TO AN END

CECELIE had been lounging carelessly against the cushions of the sofa. But at the mention of Mrs. Philip Buchanan's name she sat up with a start and looked incredulously at John Geddes.

"Mrs. Philip Buchanan!" she echoed blankly. A sudden flush dyed her pale cheeks—a sort of fierceness crept into her eyes.

Mr. Geddes nodded and smiled; he was pleased at this show of interest. He laid the letter down on her lap.

"Read it yourself, my dear young lady! It is a charming letter—most charming. There are many society women who find it impossible to keep up appearances on their incomes, and so add to them in this way. I am assured that it is a very usual thing among the four hundred, and as you see for yourself, Mrs. Buchanan makes no secret of the fact that she is in need of money."

"But—" began Cecelie impetuously.

She had never troubled to consider whether the Philip Buchanans had money of their own, or if it was all the elder brother's.

She sat with her hands clasped nervously in her lap, her blue eyes staring angrily before her; she felt a bitter resentment that this woman had dared approach her. All at once she asked a sharp question.

"Does she—Mrs. Buchanan—know my name?"

"Certainly not," said Mr. Geddes quickly. "You saw my advertisement, my dear—you know how guardedly it was worded. As a matter of fact Mrs. Buchanan has not asked for further particulars, as you see—she says an interview would be the most satisfactory way of settling matters. If you will only be sensible, and just see this lady—nothing need be arranged if you do not like her."

Cecelie sprang to her feet.

"I can't arrange anything yet," she said jerkily. "You must give me time to think it over. I'll tell you to-morrow or the next day; there is no immediate hurry, is there?"

Mr. Geddes agreed immediately; he believed that her willingness to consider the matter was entirely favorable. He took his departure, carefully leaving the fateful letter on the table.

Cecelie sat staring at it with hard eyes. What freak of fate was this that once again declined to diverge her path finally from the Buchanan's?

She wondered what Philip's wife would say when she knew it was she—Cecelie Vanstone — from whom she was proposing to take an income in return for an introduction into society! Perhaps she would refuse.

Cecelie lay awake all night weighing the matter over in her mind.

Should she accept the offer if it were seriously repeated? Was she strong enough to place herself in a position where she would be morally certain to meet Roger many, many times? Was she a sufficiently good actress to take this chance of paying him back for what she had suffered; to meet him calmly and indifferently; to let him see how little he had hurt her after all?

She sat up in bed in the darkness, too excited to sleep—she felt as if her brain would never rest any more. Her

thoughts leaped ahead, planning, scheming—

She was more than a match for him now, with her newly acquired wealth. When they had met at Newquay, she had been more or less at his mercy with her ignorance of the world, her readiness to believe in him—her dowdy clothes—and clothes were such a great factor with a man of his class!

Now she could have all the dainty frocks she wished; she could buy jewels. If he had ever been in the slightest degree attracted to her before, she would make his head reel now.

This was her chance.

The anguish of what she had passed through had upset her clear outlook on life; she forgot that she had instinctively placed Buchanan above the ordinary weaknesses of an eligible man; she had made herself believe that he could be won by wiles which women such as Mrs. Philip Buchanan use to ensnare their prey.

When, just as it began to get light, Cecelie fell asleep, she had made up her mind to accept Mrs. Buchanan's offer if it were made after they had mutually recognized each other.

IN the morning she wrote to Mr. Geddes and told him that he could arrange a meeting with Mrs. Philip Buchanan as soon as he liked.

And John Geddes rubbed his hands delightedly, and thought that he had been very clever indeed. He little guessed what influence had taken the matter entirely out of his hands from the very beginning.

He wrote to Mrs. Buchanan that same morning, and the letter was opened by Philip on its arrival.

Philip had just come in when Geddes's letter arrived. He spent most of his time, when his wife did not require him to dance attendance on her, at his club.

Philip opened the letter addressed to his wife without hesitation. As a rule, it was more than he would have dared to do; but to-day, with the memory of certain scenes between them still fresh in his mind, he felt justified.

He read the old lawyer's formal letter with great mystification.

What in the world was Lou up to now? he asked himself angrily; and why the deuce couldn't she consult him before she took such a step, whatever it was? He was hanged if he could properly make out *what* it was!

He was standing in the hall of the big house in the East Sixties with the letter in his hand when his wife came in. Louise was exquisitely dressed.

"By the way," he said, "there's a letter for you—I opened it. What is it all about?"

Louise looked round sharply.

"A letter for me — how dare you open it!" She caught it up from the hall table, an angry flush tinging her powdered cheeks. "It's just a private matter—nothing at all to interest you," she went on curtly.

Philip stood in the way as she would have passed him.

"Look here," he said, "you'd better tell me the truth. You've been advertising for some girl to chaperone, haven't you? I can read between the lines. You'll have to stop it—see?

"Roger would be furious if he knew—it's his house, after all, and he doesn't want any of your precious paying guests here. Who is she—some bootlegger's daughter, or what? If you're hard up—"

"I am," she interrupted quickly. "And, as I know it's no use applying to you, I've got to make some money

in my own way. Nobody need ever know—I shall introduce the girl as a niece. Let's hope she'll be presentable. She's got money, and is an orphan. Don't be a fool, Philip—it's done every day of the week."

"I'm not going to have it — d'ye hear?" said Philip angrily. "Roger's been generous enough as it is, and if you can't manage to keep out of debt now, what would you have done if he'd married that Miss Vanstone? He'd have cut our allowance down to half then."

"Well, he *hasn't* married Miss Vanstone, and isn't likely to," Louise retorted. "His wife will see to that. Don't be a fool, Philip! Why are you so unkind to me lately? You never used to be." There was a quiver in her voice; she applied a handkerchief to her carefully darkened eyes.

But Philip was in no mood to be melted by tears.

"The fact is, I suppose"—his kindly eyes grew narrow with suspicion—"the fact is, you've been playing again—is that it?"

He waited for an answer, but got none.

"I thought so," he went on. "What is it this time? How much do you owe?"

"I don't owe anything, and I *haven't* been playing again — except bridge—"

"That's not the truth. What have you lost? You may as well tell me."

She began to cry genuinely now. Then from the depths of the cushions came a muffled reply.

Philip Buchanan stared before him with blank eyes; then he gave a mirthless laugh.

"Good Lord!" he said tonelessly.

He was really staggered; he had always known that his wife was a gambler, but he had never known her to lose such a sum as the one she mentioned now.

Louise began to cry again.

"Philip, don't be hard on me! The girl may be quite nice. At any rate, let me have this interview with her tomorrow and see what she is like? You can't object to that; and I'll give you my word of honor that if she's hopeless I won't go any further."

She got up and slipped a persuasive arm through his, leaning her cheek against his shoulder.

"You can't refuse to let me do that," she said again in a whisper.

"Very well," he agreed reluctantly. "If the girl's decent looking—"

She drew his head down and kissed him.

It was an empty caress, and the man sighed, knowing it. He had long since given up cheating himself into the belief that his wife loved him. But that did not alter the fact that he loved her, that he thought she was the smartest and most beautiful woman in New York.

He returned her kiss obediently.

"You'd better not let Roger know, that's all," he said with a last effort to assert himself. "He'd never consent for a moment; good thing he's not coming home for a week or so. I don't know how you'll explain the girl."

"Oh, I'll explain her," laughed the wife. "Trust me!"

There was no longer any need to cry; she knew she had won the day.

Philip knew it, too, and there was a curious, shamefaced look about him as he slunk out of the room.

When the door closed behind him, his wife settled back into her chair; she no longer smiled; her face looked all at once haggard and careworn.

"Fool!" she said under her breath, biting her lip. "Fool, to make such a fuss!" She laughed bitterly. "I wonder what he'd have to say if I'd told him the truth?"

CHAPTER XIX

IN HIS HOUSE

IT all seemed like a dream to Cecelie Vanstone as she drove through the streets with Mr. Geddes the following morning and stopped outside the Buchanan house.

Roger had told her about the house. He had said, with a shrug of his shoulders, that he kept it going chiefly to amuse his brother's wife; he said that he hated the place himself, and rarely stayed there. She knew that he had an apartment somewhere in town, where he spent the greater part of his time.

Mr. Geddes assisted her out of the taxi; he was smiling and urbane.

The door was opened by a smart, liveried servant. Cecelie glanced at him and away again, her heart thumping in her breast. It seemed strange that, after all, she was in Roger Buchanan's house; that these servants were his servants, and yet none of them knew that he had once held her in his arms and said he loved her.

She followed Mr. Geddes across the hall, with its magnificent carpets and pictures, and into a long, wonderful room where the carpet was sea blue and the furniture more luxurious than she had ever pictured in her wildest dreams.

For a moment she felt like a ragamuffin who has strayed by chance into a palace; then she pulled herself sharply together. She was no longer the insignificant shopgirl she had been at Newquay; she was the rich Miss Vanstone, who had come prepared to pay the mistress of all this beauty for her services.

Cecelie smiled wryly at the thought. What a strange world it was; how unexpectedly things happened!

She sat down in a deep chair and tried not to feel nervous.

"Charming room!" Mr. Geddes said, meeting her eyes.

"It's too blue," answered Cecelie curtly; she felt that she must say something against it, although in her heart she thought it perfect.

Her eyes wandered around the lovely china and silver; the soft, satin cushions, the— She caught her breath sharply.

Just opposite to her, on a small rosewood table, was a big portrait of Roger Buchanan, silver framed.

It seemed to be looking right at her—the steady eyes, with just the expression she remembered so well.

For a moment she closed her own with a dizzy feeling—then she rose to her feet sharply as the door opened and Mrs. Philip Buchanan came in.

She was perfectly dressed; Cecelie never knew afterward how her frock was made, nor even what its color was; but her whole impression was of something so wonderfully artistic that it baffled description.

There was a second's breathless silence, then the politely painted smile on the elder woman's lips seemed to writhe and die; all the gracefulness with which she had come forward deserted her—she could only stare at Cecelie with incredulous eyes.

Cecelie had not lost her self-possession for an instant. Now the moment had come she was amazed to find how cool she was. She smiled quietly.

"Why, how strange that it should

be you!" she said sweetly, looking across at Mr. Geddes. "Mrs. Buchanan and I have met before," she explained. "At Newquay." She laughed a little. "Didn't you recall the name?" she asked, turning to Louise again. "It's not a very common one—Vanstone—is it?"

Louise was making desperate efforts to clutch her vanishing control, but she could not quite hide the chagrin in her voice, though she held out her hand to Cecelie with apparent friendliness.

"Miss Vanstone! What a strange *contretemps!* No—Mr. Geddes did not mention your name, or I might have thought—"

She paused with a feeling of helplessness. What in the world would Cecelie want with a chaperone? she wondered.

She thought of the cheap, black evening frock, and the night it had been spoiled with soup. The horrible suspicion flashed through her mind that Cecelie had made fools of them all—that she had been rich all the time—that she had just been pretending!

"It was so nice of you to write," Cecelie went on. She did not allow the other time to question. "Mr. Geddes has explained everything to you, has he not? I think your terms will suit me nicely. Of course there are a great many details to be arranged, but that will not take long."

MRS. BUCHANAN sat down with a feeling of crushed helplessness. She had named a sum far exceeding what she had hoped to obtain—she was torn with the desire to refuse to go on with the matter at all, and her anxiety to settle it before Cecelie had time to repent of her acceptance.

What would Roger say? That was the only thing of which she could think.

How would he take it?

"You're not going to refuse to take me, are you?" asked Cecelie, laughing. "I've often wondered if we should meet again—I am sure we shall get on very well together, although I know you did not like me very much at Newquay."

Mrs. Philip Buchanan broke into confused protestations. She had been dreadfully sorry when Cecelie left the hotel—Roger, her brother-in-law, had been simply inconsolable.

Looking back at the whole scene afterward, Cecelie marveled that she had not broken down long before. But even now, at mention of the man for whose sake she was here, she contrived to laugh—a laugh so perfectly natural that it deceived both her hearers.

"Was he? How quaint! I have so often wondered what you really thought of our little flirtation, Mrs. Buchanan! I know some of the people there looked upon it as quite serious. So absurd, wasn't it?"

Louise could only stare.

"I shall be quite pleased to see Mr. Buchanan again," Cecelie went on in a tone that sounded merely polite. "But he is away just now, I believe, is he not?"

Mrs. Buchanan stammered that they expected him home in a week or so. She was furious with herself that she had wasted so much energy on successfully rupturing the affair.

Before she knew where she was she found herself alone with a check for a thousand dollars, and the whole matter conclusively settled.

Cecelie had insisted on Mr. Geddes leaving the check; she had said laugh-

ingly that she really felt she must give some guarantee for herself.

She laughed and chatted away until the door of the waiting taxi closed once more on them, then she leaned back with closed eyes, a little pale and breathless.

"A charming woman, don't you think, my dear?" asked Mr. Geddes timidly; he did not know quite what to make of Cecelie in this new mood. "I am sure you will be perfectly safe in her hands—you will have a delightful time."

But Cecelie did not answer. She was thinking of that portrait of Roger Buchanan in its silver frame; of the eyes that had seemed to follow her reproachfully as she walked out of the beautiful room.

When she got home she wrote a long letter to Kathy:

> You'll think I'm utterly, utterly mad when I tell you what I have done. Kathy, I have engaged Mrs. Philip Buchanan to chaperone me for a whole season, and find me an eligible husband.
>
> At least, I suppose that's what she thinks I want.
>
> I wonder what she'd say if she knew the truth, which is—but I can't tell even you, though perhaps you can guess!
>
> I'm going to her house in four days' time, and then you must come and see me, Kathy. Imagine you and me in her house! I could die laughing when I think of it, and when I remember the way she used to edge away from us when we passed her at Newquay!
>
> It's my turn now—my turn, and then—

Cecelie stopped writing as if her train of thought had suddenly snapped; desolation flooded her soul.

Revenge! What was it, after all, when the wound in her heart was still torn and bleeding?

She dropped her head to her arms with a little moan, and Kathy—Kathy, who was slowly beginning to understand and read between the lines of her friend's character—knew that they were tears that had smudged and blurred the hurriedly written letter with its veneer of brave indifference.

CHAPTER XX

WORTH THE CANDLE

LOUISE had subjugated her husband afresh by the time Cecelie arrived; they greeted her together, apparently on the best of terms, and there was genuine welcome in Philip's voice as he shook hands with her.

"Glad to see you," he said heartily. "Seems a long time since we met—eh?" And then without waiting for a reply, he rushed off in confusion, as if afraid he would say something wrong about Roger, or otherwise put his foot in it.

He had written to his brother, a clumsy, well-meaning letter, telling him how slow it was in town; how dull; and advising him to stay where he was.

In a final burst of what he considered tact, he added:

> Lou has a girl staying here—a silly flapper—she'd bore you to tears, old man; so stay where you are, and I'll pay you a visit presently.

He thought that a very diplomatic move on his part; he firmly believed that Roger would calmly do as he was told. So he settled down to enjoy his dinner with Cecelie and his wife with great appetite.

The dinner was not quite a success. Try as both women would to smooth things, the situation was strained.

They were both glad when the meal was ended.

Philip — under orders from his wife—had taken a box at a theater; they were joined in it by a friend of his, a good-looking, rather boyish young man who was immensely impressed with Cecelie. He kept his eyes on her instead of on the stage most of the time; he asked Philip a hundred questions about her, all of which Philip evaded.

The girl was conscious of opera glasses leveled at her from the orchestra and boxes opposite—it was a thrilling experience to be in such a situation. Even Louise Buchanan felt a little twinge of importance.

Cecelie would shape well, she told herself. If only Roger took the hint and stayed where he was all would go smoothly.

Roger seldom came to town for the season—last year he had wintered abroad. Pray Heaven he would stay down South now.

Philip's friend, Donald Forsyth, went home with them in the Buchanans' car; he sat next to Cecelie, and talked the whole time. He said that he had a car of his own, and asked if she would allow him to take her driving some day.

"I'm a very careful driver," he said anxiously. "Ask Mrs. Buchanan—she's been with me several times. I bought the car from Roger. You know Roger, I suppose? He let me have the car cheap, too—only used it a few weeks himself. Took the thing down to Newquay in the summer to run about in.

"Odd thing, but he told me he hated the sight of it when he came back and offered it to me. Nice to be so rich that you can change your car every few weeks, isn't it?"

"Miss Vanstone went out in the car with Roger at Newquay," said Louise smoothly. "Didn't you?"

"Yes," said Cecelie readily. "I thought it a very nice car."

"Well, then, you'll like to see it again," said Forsyth eagerly. "Will you come in the morning? I'll call for you?"

Louise interposed gently:

"Not to-morrow, Donald. We've got a busy day before us. Some other day; what do you think, Cecelie?"

"Yes. I think some other day would be best," said Cecelie.

She and Philip's wife agreed that they must call each other by their Christian names to keep up the illusion. But what a farce it was—*what* a farce!

She was thankful when they reached home; thankful when the evening was ended and she was free to go to bed.

She locked the door and sat down in a chair, heartsick and weary.

Was the game worth the candle? she asked herself bitterly. Would it not be far, far better to end it all and go away?

Once she had longed to be alone, to be allowed to be quiet and brood over her sorrow undisturbed; but now she was afraid of solitude. She felt that she must have continued excitement to keep her going; the rush of the world; that she must never be still a moment; never allow herself to think.

But she thanked God as she crept into bed that Roger Buchanan was not in New York; that he was still away, and likely to remain so for the present.

After all, she was not as strong as she had believed herself to be; she wanted time to get used to her new surroundings before she saw him.

She shut her eyes and tried not to think of him; but when at last she fell

asleep, she dreamed that he and she walked the golden sands of Newquay Bay hand in hand.

CHAPTER XXI

JUST FOR A WALK

CECELIE wrote:

> I've been here just a week, and do you know, Kathy dear, that, in spite of everything, I have managed to enjoy myself! Mrs. Buchanan does everything so well—the house is perfectly managed, and there are visitors every day. I seemed to have crowded a whole lifetime into these seven days.
>
> When are you coming to see me, Kathy? I so often think of you, and wonder what you are doing—and if you are happy.
>
> I called once at the hospital to see you. I suppose they told you? But you were on duty or something and they wouldn't let me.
>
> Sometimes I long to tell Mrs. Buchanan's friends the whole truth. Of course she passes me off as a kind of distant relation of hers. Isn't it a farce?
>
> I like her husband. He's a really good sort, but very weak—she quite rules him! I should hate a weak husband—

Cecelie stopped and let the pen fall to the blotter.

She was writing in the long, blue drawing-room, and the last rays of the red October sunset were just filtering through the big windows.

She leaned her chin in her hand and stared out of the window into the street.

It was strange how at home she felt in this house. The first discomfort of being beneath Louise Buchanan's chaperonage had passed. As she told Kathy, she had managed, so far, to have quite a good time.

Donald Forsyth was devoted to her, and there were other men who paid her attention.

Philip had a decided *penchant* for Cecelie. She was always very nice to him; he felt more sorry than ever for "poor old Roger's" disappointment.

"By the way," he said suddenly, to his wife one day, "what's become of Rosa Desmond? Hasn't she ever turned up since we were down at Newquay?"

Louise shrugged her shoulders.

"How should I know? Roger sent her some money before he went away, I know. She's appearing at one of the theaters this season — next month, I believe."

Philip whistled.

"I shall have to go and see her," he said. "She's a very beautiful woman."

Louise bit her lips; she might not love her husband, but she hated him to admire other women.

"Like a fairy story, isn't it?" he resumed. "Roger's marriage — then meeting Miss Vanstone—then his wife turning up—"

"I wish you wouldn't always be harping on Roger and Cecelie. She never was serious, I am certain. She wouldn't have got over it so soon if she had been! I shouldn't be surprised to hear she and Donald were engaged any day."

"Donald isn't good enough for her," protested her husband quickly. "He's a decent sort—but he's only a boy. She wants a man—a spirited girl like that! Roger was the man for her."

Louise shut her book with a snap.

"Oh, you wear me out with your continual harping about Roger!" she said impatiently. She settled an amber-colored cushion beneath her head and closed her eyes.

Philip looked at her and sighed; he could not understand how it was that he and Louise always quarreled if they were left alone for ten minutes.

He went downstairs in search of Cecelie; she at least always had a smile for him. She turned as he entered.

It was not Philip who stood there but his brother Roger

"May I come in?" he asked.

She rose to her feet.

"Why, of course! I'm only writing to Kathy—you remember Kathy, don't you? She was with me at Newquay."

"And a very nice girl she was," said Philip. "I often used to say when Louise—"

He broke off in confusion; he had been about to repeat some of his wife's sarcastic comments on Kathy's clothes.

Cecelie laughed, but her eyes were kind; he was so obvious, this big, blundering man with his kind heart and weak will.

"I dare say we seemed awfully dowdy to Mrs. Buchanan," she said kindly. "She always dresses so beautifully."

"Yes, doesn't she?" said Philip. He looked pleased. "She's a handsome woman. You ought to have seen her when we were married. The papers raved about her in her wedding dress. I was proud of her!"

"I am sure you were," said Cecelie.

She scribbled a brief ending to her letter to Kathy and put it in an envelope.

"Do you know what I want to do?" she said, laughing. "Well, I'll tell you—just go for a common or garden walk. Are you shocked?"

"Shocked?" Philip grinned delightedly. "Not a bit of it! I'll come with you if you don't mind waiting a minute. I feel cramped myself—houses are so small, aren't they? Give me the country—but Louise hates it, you know."

Cecelie was wearing her hat; her coat lay on a chair where she had laid it down when she came in to write her letter.

She stamped and addressed the envelope to Kathy—Philip went out of the room.

After a moment she heard him come back.

"I'm ready," she said. She picked up her coat and held it out toward him. "Please help me on with it."

She did not look at him as she spoke—but the coat was taken and held while she slipped her arms into it and turned.

The laughing remark she had begun to make died on her lips; for a moment she closed her eyes dizzily, then she turned her head slowly.

It was not Philip who stood there—but his brother, Roger!

CHAPTER XXII

JEALOUSY

ROGER BUCHANAN never knew what it was that drove him back to New York; he had been having quite a good time in Florida. There are always women everywhere who will see to it that an eligible bachelor enjoys himself.

He had not informed his brother of his intention; he had decided that he would just walk in and give them all a surprise.

And after all, as he told himself with a giddy sensation of confused unreality, it was he who had had the surprise.

He stood staring at Cecelie as if she were a ghost. Since their last meeting he had longed to see her again—but here. That she should be *here* in his own brother's house!

Cecelie found her voice first; she laughed shrilly.

"You are surprised to see me?"

In one overwhelming second she had realized that all her nourished hatred of him had been a farce and pretense; she had tried to hate him—she had forced herself to believe that she did—and it was all untrue—all a mockery!

At that moment, as he stood there with the rays of the setting sun on his thin face, she knew that she loved him as greatly as ever—that if he had held out his arms to her she would have gone to him and forgotten all the grief and bitter humiliation that had gone before.

The knowledge stung her into Spartan self-control; she sat down again at the writing table and looked up at him with eyes that betrayed nothing of her true feelings.

"You're not very polite, Mr. Buchanan," she told him amusedly. "You might at least say 'How do you do?' Didn't you know I was here? I thought Louise would surely have told you. I've been here—just a week, I think it is."

She settled a single gardenia in the lapel of her coat—there was not a

tremor of the slim hands which Buchanan had once so ardently kissed.

Twice Roger tried to speak, but no words would come. He felt as if he were mad, or dreaming.

Cecelie here—in Philip's house—Cecelie calling Philip's wife by her Christian name — of course it could not be true! He was dreaming—this girl was just a phantom creation of his brain.

"I'm sorry to have kept you waiting," said Philip's voice behind him cheerily, "but I just ran up to tell Louise and get my coat. If you're ready—*Roger!*"

Cecelie broke into the amazed silence.

"Yes, Mr. Buchanan just walked in—he was so surprised to see me. Why didn't you tell him I was here?"

Philip had gone scarlet; his kindly eyes sought his brother's with a comical mixture of shame and defiance. He moistened his lips agitatedly.

"Thought you were miles away on the other end of the continent!" he gasped. "Why didn't you wire? When did you reach New York?"

He made an embarrassed rush at his brother and wrung his hand.

"Have you come to dinner? Louise will be pleased to see you. You look seedy still."

Roger found his voice at last; he forced a smile to his pale lips.

"I only looked in on my way to my apartment. How are you all? Well, I hope— Louise and the boy? Don't let me upset your plans—if you and Miss Vanstone were going out anywhere."

"We were only going for a walk before dinner," Cecelie explained calmly. "We both made the discovery that the house was too small. But I don't know that I'm very keen, after all—and, now you've come, of course you'd like to have a little chat together."

She moved toward the door.

"Good-by—till dinner!" she said with a friendly smile that included them both. The door shut gently behind her.

THERE was a moment's tragic silence, then Philip rushed into jerky explanations.

"I don't know what to say to you, old man. I hoped you wouldn't have come till she'd left us—I hinted as much in my letter. It's all Louise, of course; I begged her—" He broke off, shrugging his shoulders. "You know how obstinate she is," he ended hopelessly.

Roger passed a hand across his mouth and eyes; he looked a little dazed still.

"I don't understand in the least," he said stiffly. "Has Louise suddenly developed a liking for Miss Vanstone? I shall be glad if you'll kindly explain."

Philip began to pace the room agitatedly; he wanted to screen his wife, but he did not want to anger Roger.

"You may as well tell me," his brother went on with a tinge of impatience. "I'll find out the truth, no matter what cock-and-bull story you choose to tell. Do you want me to go and ask Louise myself?"

"No, no. I'll tell you. It's just like this." He stopped helplessly, only to rush on again. "It's often done in our set. Louise got the craze, and so—"

Roger swung round on his heel.

"Are you trying to make me believe that Miss Vanstone is *paying* Louise for her kind chaperonage?" he asked with sarcasm. "If you are—"

"It's the truth," said Roger eagerly. "I give you my word it's the truth!

She paid a few thousand down and more to come in three months; and if she picks up a chap with money—"

Roger's face was incredulous; suddenly he laughed.

"Don't talk rot, Toby!" he said at last, unconsciously using the name by which his brother had been known in their boyhood days. "Miss Vanstone hasn't a nickel. You must think of something better than that."

"It's the truth!" Philip persisted doggedly. "She's got lots of money; some one died and left it all to her. Louise will tell you the story—or you can ask Miss Vanstone yourself. She's made no secret of it. She's often spoken to me about her former life in some shop. She's not a bit proud. In fact, she's a darned nice girl!" added Philip defiantly.

Roger's face looked grim. The sudden shock of his meeting with Cecelie was passing off, and pain—real, horrible pain—was waking in his heart; also jealousy—insane jealousy of his brother.

He could not trust himself to speak. He brushed Philip roughly aside and strode out of the room.

Philip went upstairs to his wife's boudoir; he put his head round the door without knocking.

"The fat's in the fire," he said gloomily; "Roger's home!"

Louise dropped her book with a start.

"Well," she asked sharply, "what of it?"

"He walked into the drawing-room and saw Cecelie. I told him, but he doesn't believe me, I can see."

Louise laughed contemptuously.

"What rubbish! This is *my* house. I shall have whom I please here."

Philip came in and shut the door.

"I don't know so much about that," he said tentatively. "Roger pays the rent, and the man who pays the piper has the right to call the tune. If he knows about that debt for cards—"

She started up tensely to a sitting posture.

"You fool!" she shrilled at him. "Have you told him?"

Philip looked injured. "Now, is it likely?" he questioned irately.

She lay back again, laughing shakily.

"Anything's likely—with *you*," she said.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE BEAUTIFUL DANCER

CECELIE came downstairs late for dinner that night. She had been dressed some time, but she could not—simply *could* not, force herself to open her bedroom door and walk down to face Roger.

In vain she called herself a contemptible coward; in vain she conjured up that last meeting with him at Newquay, the cruel things he had said to her, the shame that had overwhelmed her heart; in vain she reminded herself that now was her chance — now was her opportunity to repay her debt with interest.

Her courage had all gone—her cheeks burned feverishly, and yet she shivered from head to foot. It was only when the tiny clock on her dressing table showed the time as past the dinner hour that she dragged open the door and went down the wide staircase.

She was perfectly dressed; the wild flush in her cheeks added to her beauty; the touch of desperate defiance in her carriage gave her dignity. Had she but known it she was a thousand

times more desirable now than she had ever been.

But she felt weak and irresolute. All her self-confidence had deserted her. She would have given anything for Kathy and the quiet peace of Mrs. Wrigley's second floor front.

Even the crying of the fat baby would have been preferable to the throbbing silence and splendor of this great house.

But when she reached the drawing-room only Philip was there. He was pulling his slight mustache and looking dreadfully uncomfortable.

Cecelie glanced nervously round the room. When she saw it was empty save for him, she went forward with a little sigh.

"Roger's gone," said Philip. "I tried to persuade him to stay, but he wouldn't." He glanced at Cecelie half timidly. "Don't you think he looks bad?" he asked jerkily. "I think he's thinner than when he went away. The doctors ordered him South for his health. You know, Newquay didn't suit him, it seems."

"Oh! What is the matter with him, then?"

Cecelie was astonished at the unconcern of her voice; she sat down in a deep chair, wondering if she looked as faint and ill as she felt.

"Lungs!" said Philip sadly. "He had a bad illness eight months ago, you know, and never got over it. Doctor looked very grave last time he saw him. He doesn't seem to have any stamina in him now, somehow! He used to be strong enough, too. When we were boys he could knock me over like a ninepin. Doubt if he could now."

"Perhaps he looks worse than he is," said Cecelie casually. "Some people's looks always pity them."

"He'd no right to come back to town," Philip went on uneasily. "New York never suits him. Doctors told him to take a voyage to South Africa, but he won't—he's so stubborn. Poor old Roger! Hello, my dear—" This last to Louise, who had just entered the door.

She looked sharply round the room.

"Where's Roger?"

"He's gone," said Cecelie lightly. "I am wondering if I have frightened him away."

Louise laughed.

"Nonsense! Roger seldom honors us with his company; but I think he might have waited to say, 'How do you do?' to me."

They went in to dinner. Philip looked uneasy; he glanced at his wife nervously from time to time. Cecelie chatted away in apparent unconcern.

The relief of finding that Roger was not to be there after all had been enormous. She felt comparatively light-hearted; it was a reprieve — however short.

Donald Forsyth turned up before dinner was ended. He apologized for his intrusion, saying that he had tickets for a show and wanted them all to come along.

He looked at Cecelie as he spoke—his eyes were pleading.

"Philip and Cecelie will go," said Louise quickly. "If you will excuse me, I have an engagement." Her eyes met her husband's defiantly. "Philip, you'll take Miss Vanstone, won't you?"

"Delighted!" he drawled; but there was a frown on his good-tempered face. He knew what his wife's "engagement" was—knew that she would, in all probability, have added to her enormous card debts before they met again.

Louise was proverbially unlucky at cards; one or two superstitious women of her acquaintance refused to play if they knew she was to be at the same table.

THE three drove away from the house in Forsyth's car.

Cecelie turned to Donald. "What are we going to see to-night?" she asked.

"It's a new dancer," he explained eagerly.

He was very much in love with Cecelie. To do him justice he would have been just as eager for her favors if she had not had a penny to her name. He was the bankrupt son of a bankrupt father himself, but he was sufficiently in love to forget temporarily that one cannot live on unpaid bills and mortgages.

"She's in town for the first time, and they say she'll make a tremendous hit! Been a great success in the sticks and abroad. Perhaps you've heard of her—Rosa Desmond is her name."

"Good Lord!" ejaculated Philip helplessly.

They both looked at him.

"Do you know her?" asked Forsyth interestedly.

Philip recovered himself with an effort.

"I? Well, no — not exactly — at least, I *have* seen her dance. She's a very beautiful woman!"

"Oh! Is that all?" Forsyth's eyes twinkled; he believed he had stumbled on an episode of his friend's bachelor life. "I thought you knew more than that about her, perhaps," he added, laughing.

"Well, I knew the chap she married," stammered Philip awkwardly. "He was a pal of mine—nice chap—and she did her best to ruin him! He was only a youngster at the time, and madly in love with her. She's a beauty, you see."

"What became of him?" asked Cecelie. She was not in the least interested, but she felt that she must force herself to talk and listen—she dared not allow herself time to think, for then—

"Nothing—poor devil!" said Philip with heartfelt sympathy. "They led an awful life, and then she left him. That was years ago; and now—"

He stopped, realizing with a thrill of horror that he had been about to betray his brother.

"I don't know what's happened to him now," he added untruthfully.

The car stopped at the theater. A uniformed doorman opened the door for them, and Philip leaped out, glad to escape further conversation. Forsyth held his hand to Cecelie.

"I hope you'll enjoy the show," he said eagerly. "I heard you say you were keen on dancing, and I got the tickets purposely."

"You're very kind," she answered mechanically.

She felt glad of the support of his arm; she hoped with a little shiver that she was not going to be ill. She could not remember when she had felt so strangely weak before.

The cool darkness of the theater soothed her; she leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes. The orchestra was playing a dreamy waltz.

Forsyth leaned over her.

"Don't you feel well, Miss Vanstone? Would you like me to take you home?"

Cecelie opened her eyes with a start.

"Oh, no; thank you—I was only thinking." She took herself severely to task; she must not give way like this a second time. She exerted her-

self to talk and laugh with him till the curtain went up.

PHILIP sat nervously, leaned his elbows on his knees, and stared before him at the stage with expectant eyes. He wondered what Roger would say when he knew. In his heart he hoped that she would be a success.

A roar of applause woke him from his thoughts. He sat up with a start as Rosa Desmond floated onto the stage.

There could be no two opinions about her beauty. In her way she was exquisite; her whole body so dainty and perfectly formed—her wealth of auburn hair rippling unbound down her back. It might be dyed, as Philip declared, but it was beautiful all the same.

Cecelie watched her with fascinated eyes. So light, so graceful—her movements reminded one of a butterfly flitting across a field of buttercups.

"Great, isn't she?" whispered Forsyth enthusiastically.

"Yes," answered Cecelie. "I think she's wonderful!"

When the dance was ended, and the dancer sank down in a swirl of airy draperies, Philip clapped his hands sore. Then he remembered—and subsided.

What would Cecelie say if she knew who this dancer was? If she knew that it was through her that Roger—He looked at the girl Roger loved deprecatingly.

"Like her?" he asked.

"I think she's perfect," said Cecelie. She sat back in her chair with a little sigh. "I don't wonder your friend was so mad about her! I never saw any one more beautiful!"

Philip felt a twinge of compunction.

"Beauty's only skin deep, they say," he said awkwardly. He felt it was somehow mean of him to allow Cecelie to go on eulogizing her rival. "The women who look such angels, often have tempers like the very devil!" he added.

The cheering and applause continued—Rosa Desmond came back smiling and triumphant. Her glorious velvety eyes swept the enthusiastic house with the assurance of success. The orchestra began to play again, a seductive rhythm.

"She's going to give us another," said Philip excitedly.

The house grew silent again; the men on either side of Cecelie leaned forward eagerly.

A long finger of spotlight was flashed on from the wings; in its whiteness Rosa Desmond's little figure twirled and swayed like a lily in a storm.

At the conclusion she bent her slender body right back till the masses of auburn hair swept the floor.

"She's made a hit, all right," said Forsyth when the curtain descended for the last time on the beautiful, triumphant figure. "Buchanan, I wonder if your friend—the man she married—is among the audience?"

Philip started guiltily. "Good Lord! I wonder if he is," he ejaculated helplessly.

When the lights were flashed on again he stood up and peered round anxiously. His simple mind realized what a tragedy it must be for Roger if he were there—to see Cecelie in her box, laughing and applauding the woman he had married in his boyhood's folly—the woman who had wrecked his life.

But though he scanned the house with Cecelie's glasses, he could not see

his brother. He sat down again with a sigh of relief.

AS they waited in the vestibule while the doorman looked for Forsyth's car, a man in evening dress came up to them. He laid a hand on Forsyth's arm.

"Hello, Don!"

Forsyth turned delightedly, and the two men shook hands. The newcomer was introduced to Cecelie and Philip.

"Haven't seen you for years," Forsyth said. "Where have you been all this time?"

The other shrugged careless shoulders.

"Anywhere and everywhere. I just dropped in here to see Rosa Desmond. What do you think of her, Miss Vanstone?"

"I never saw any one more beautiful," said Cecelie generously. "I hope I shall see her again—"

"I used to know her years ago," Forsyth's friend said. "She wasn't famous then. I went round to her dressing-room just now to renew the acquaintance. She hasn't altered much."

"Buchanan knew her, too," said Forsyth "She married a friend of his—"

The other man stared; he raised surprised brows.

"Your name Buchanan?" he asked quizzically. "How odd! Rosa had a fellow of that name round there with her just now when I looked in. No relation, I suppose? Roger, I think she called him."

There was an awkward silence. Philip went crimson, and then pale. He looked quickly at Cecelie and away again.

"My brother's name is Roger," he stammered at last, seeing it was useless to hedge. "But it couldn't have been him—he hates the stage and dancers. It couldn't have been Roger."

"No?" the other man queried indifferently. "Odd it should be the same name. Tall, thin-looking beggar, Rosa's friend. Looked consumptive, I thought."

Some one else came along to claim his attention; the others went out to their car.

"It couldn't have been Roger," said Philip again uneasily as the door was shut upon them. "He's not the man to hang around stage doors."

"Must have been his double," said Forsyth, laughing. "They say we all have one."

"I don't see why it couldn't have been Mr. Buchanan," said Cecelie quietly. "He may have admired Miss Desmond as much as we all did, and have just gone to speak to her. If I were a man she would be my ideal of womanhood. I think she's lovely!"

Philip stared at her; it almost seemed as if she must know of Rosa's relationship to his brother, and was speaking deliberately in her favor.

"I prefer fair women to dark," said Forsyth. His hand slid along the seat in the darkness and found Cecelie's.

She let it lie in his clasp without resisting. There was something kind and comforting in his touch, and she was so miserable — so utterly, utterly miserable!

When they got home Philip asked at once for his wife. She was not in. He frowned and glanced at the clock. It was ten minutes to twelve.

Cecelie and Forsyth had gone into the drawing-room. Forsyth closed the door. Cecelie threw aside her cloak; she looked very young and fair as she stood there with the rose-shaded light shining on her bare throat.

To her excited imagination the pictured eyes of Roger Buchanan seemed to be following her wherever she went. She wished she dared turn the silver-framed photograph round so that it faced the wall. She sat down wearily, pulling a cushion beneath her head.

Forsyth crossed the room suddenly, and, bending over her, laid a hand on either arm of the deep chair, so that she was imprisoned. There was a little flush on his youthful face.

"Will you be my wife?" he said shakily. "I can't tell you how much I love you—I was never good at expressing my feelings—but—but I'd *die* for you—" he added passionately.

Cecelie started up; she tried to escape him, but he held her back gently.

"Don't be angry, don't run away—just listen to me! I don't want you to answer me now, but I couldn't help telling you. I haven't anything to offer you. I haven't any money, and I know you're rich. But I love you—and if you don't love any one else—"

Cecelie broke down suddenly; his gentle earnestness seemed to have melted the hard misery that bound her heart. She was no longer the rich Miss Vanstone, with all the world at her feet—she was just a heartbroken girl, weeping for the man who had won her love and thrown it away.

She turned sidewise in the big chair and, leaning her head on her folded arms, cried shudderingly.

CHAPTER XXIV

CRUSHING NEWS

THE sudden shock of seeing Cecelie in his brother's house had, for the time being, robbed Roger Buchanan of all power to think or act definitely.

It was only when he was alone in his apartment that the full force and meaning of it all came back to him.

Cecelie was under his brother's roof as a paying guest!

Cecelie was paying Louise to introduce her into society—paying her to find her a husband, in other words!

How she had changed in the few short weeks since they had met at Newquay! There was a new, almost insolent self-possession about her; she had faced him with all the calm indifference of a woman of the world. If she had ever cared for him she had apparently forgotten it very quickly!

He paced his room in restless agitation; in all his careless life he had never believed it possible that he could suffer as this girl from behind the counter of a department store had made him suffer.

What was her reason for having gone to Louise of all women? He recalled the bitter way she had spoken of his sister-in-law; surely of all the hundreds of society women in New York she could have chosen some one else to chaperon her.

How beautiful she had looked, and yet— He thought with intolerable pain of her frank, unaffected manner at Newquay—what had happened so to change her?

Where had she got her money? What had become of the man with whom he had seen her dining that night?

But for Rosa Desmond she would have been his wife now; but for Rosa Desmond, who *was* his wife. He gritted his teeth.

What was the use of thinking of it all—such thoughts could only lead to madness! He was tied hand and foot. Rosa was young and strong—not nearly so likely to die as himself.

He stopped in front of a glass and looked at his reflection with a sort of commiseration.

He looked ill. He felt ill. Perhaps, after all, the only solution of the tragedy would be his own death. He was the pivot round which all the others seemed to revolve.

Louise wanted his money for her son; he was tied to one woman while he longed for another with all the strength of his manhood. What was the use of living on? What had life left to offer him?

He made a pretense of dining, afterward he took his hat and went out.

He longed to go back to his brother's house and see what Cecelie was doing, but he knew it was utter folly to think of such a thing. She could be nothing to him. Even were he free, it was unlikely that she would forgive him now.

For the hundredth time he cursed his folly for not having told her the truth. She might have thrust him out of her life—she might have forced herself to forget him—but at least she would not have grown to hate and despise him as she did now!

It was hate he had read in the cool insolence of her eyes during that moment they stood facing each other in the drawing-room. *Hate!* He caught his breath hard in his throat.

Incongruously he thought of Kathy, who had looked at him with kindliness in her eyes as she pleaded with him for her friend.

What was *she* thinking of him? He wished he could see her — wished he could know if she, too, loathed and despised even the mention of his name.

He walked on listlessly—tired and dispirited. He wished he had not come back to the city—the crowded streets seemed to stifle him. Everything got on his nerves and jarred.

Unconsciously he found himself stopping to look at some photographs and posters outside a theater. He stared at them with blank eyes. What objects some women made of themselves!

He had never been able to understand the glamour of the chorus girl to which so many of his friends had succumbed. Even years ago, when he had first known Rosa, he had hated the stage, and had done his best to discourage her passion for it.

They had first quarreled over that; she sighed for excitement and admiration; she could not be happy acting to a one-man audience. After the first few days of married life the new tie between them had grown into a chain binding them together — fellow prisoners.

He had longed for his freedom; had been thankful beyond measure when he found a curt note from her saying that she had left him forever. He had thanked God when, barely a year later, he had heard of her death. He had thrown a pall of forgiveness across the grave of that youthful folly and believed it buried forever.

But the dead can rise, apparently! For now, after all these years, Rosa had come out of her grave to mock him.

The woman at whose portrait he stared reminded him of her—there were the same siren eyes; the same dainty limbs and wealth of hair; the—

Buchanan stared and passed a hand across his eyes.

The pictured woman was Rosa Desmond herself!

A RUSH of color flooded his face; his heart began to beat fast. She was his wife, this woman who smiled from the walls of a theater in

the glare of electric light—his wife—the woman who bore his name!

Two youths in evening dress paused beside him and looked over his shoulder at the portraits.

"Stunning, isn't she?" said one with vapid enthusiasm.

"She'll be the rage of N' Yawk this season, you'll see! Wonder if she's married?"

The other laughed. "Dare say—

"You might have been killed!" gasped Kathy. "Some one would be glad perhaps," returned Rosa coolly

most of 'em are. She's got a sugar daddy in the running, though."

They moved off.

Buchanan looked after them with furious eyes. These were the sort of men who bandied his wife's name! He wondered what she would say if he went round to the stage door and sent in his card and demanded to see her.

They had not met since that morning at Newquay; he had sent her a check and duly received acknowledgment. But beyond that she had not troubled him.

He thought again of Cecelie—of the cool way she had spoken to him. The memory scourged him. Before he was conscious of having moved a step he found himself in the passage at the back of the theater. He was passed from one person to another, and finally handed over to the mercies of a pert-eyed maid.

She looked at his card and smiled knowingly.

"I think Miss Desmond will see you, sir," she said.

Buchanan had a feeling that the "sir" was a concession to a possible tip—she did not look like the sort of girl who would pay much involuntary respect to any one.

He heard her speak his name with that same knowing inflection in her voice, then he was ushered in. For a moment the brilliance of the room dazzled him; then he saw Rosa sitting at the dressing table carefully making up her face. She half turned in her chair.

"Hullo!" she said. She gave him a careless nod. "I thought it was Philip; I never expected the honor of a visit from *you*. What do *you* want?"

She laid down the rabbit's foot and looked at him with a laugh in her velvety eyes.

"How's tricks?" she asked with a change of voice. "You look rotten! Been ill?"

"No." Already Buchanan was wishing he had not come; he hated the scented familiarity of the room, with its silver and silk cushions and signed photographs. He wondered how many men she had entertained there.

She scrutinized him for a moment in silence, then—

"Pining after number two?" she asked cruelly. "Oh, yes, I heard all about the girl at Newquay. Rotten hard luck on you, my turning up just then, wasn't it?"

Roger flushed. "Who told you?" he asked.

She shrugged her bare shoulders.

"Oh, I found out—I can find out most things when I want to. What was she like, Roger? Anything like me?"

He looked at her painted face and mocking eyes and shuddered.

The little silent denial goaded her to anger; she sprang to her feet, upsetting a large bottle of perfume that stood at her elbow.

"If you've come here to insult me," she raged at him, "you can get out. I don't want your company—though it's not so very long ago since you were ready to go on your knees to me for mine! You've got a conveniently short memory, but I *haven't*, see? If I chose I could go and tell your precious ladylove a few things that she wouldn't be exactly pleased to hear!"

She broke off, panting; suddenly her anger dropped from her as quickly as it had risen. She crossed to where he stood and laid a wheedling hand on his arm.

"Let's be pals, and make it up," she said in a sort of coaxing whisper. "I'm not such a bad sort — and I'll make a hit to-night, see if I don't! I'm

fond of you, too, in a way—I've often thought about you in these nine years." A suspicion of tears crept into her voice. "It wasn't all my fault that we didn't get along. I've wondered since if we should have got on any better if we'd had a child."

Buchanan shook her off almost violently; he knew now that he had been a fool to come—a fool to have allowed a moment of reckless misery to drive him to seek her out; a longing for distraction, for something to change the current of his thoughts. He felt as if he could have struck her as she stood there acting—*acting!*

"You can stop that," he said roughly. "It's too late to try those tricks on me. I was a fool to come here—I wish to God I were dead!"

She stared at him—suddenly she laughed.

"Well, I should say you'll have your wish before long, by the look of you! *I'm* not going to die and let her step into my shoes, and don't you think it! I dare say she'd like to call herself 'Mrs. Roger Buchanan,' wouldn't she? Well, she won't have the chance, see?

"I'm your wife, and you can't get rid of me. I've never been a bother to you, but I'm not so sure that I don't intend to begin now. I don't see why people shouldn't know that my husband is of one of the best families! I'd rather like to run round as Mrs. Roger Buchanan.

"What would you say if I sued this girl you're in love with for alienation of affections? I'd win, too — there's nothing against me—I've been straight all my life!"

Buchanan looked ghastly; he knew this woman; knew that she would be as good as her word. His tortured imagination pictured the scene — the vulgar newspaper reports, Cecelie's name dragged in the mire, the whole sordid story made public.

"You can do what you like," he said with an effort. "I won't try to prevent you. I don't care what you do."

The velvety eyes softened. Perhaps, after all, it was true that Rosa Desmond was fond of this man in her own way; perhaps she had thought about him with a twinge of remorse during the long years since they had met. Perhaps she was sorry now to see how ill and haggard he had grown in the three short months since that tragic encounter at Newquay.

"You're making a rod for your own back," she said, mollified. "I'm not like your precious sister-in-law—she's a cat, if ever there was one! If *she'd* been your wife you might have said something. *I* don't gamble and fool my money away anyhow—as she does."

"What do you know about it?" There was a sudden angry gleam in Buchanan's eyes.

She laughed provokingly.

"Oh, I know! There isn't much I don't know about your precious family, I can tell you. After all, they're my own relations, aren't they?" she mocked him. "Isn't dear Louise my sister-in-law, too? Oh, I know about her—I know she's up to her eyes in debt—I know that she's taken to hawking some girl around town to pay for what she's lost at cards—and that's more than *you* know, I'll warrant!"

Buchanan said nothing; his thin face looked hard and stern.

Rosa watched him from under her long lashes.

"Well," she said suddenly, "I don't want to quarrel with you—you've been generous to me. Do you know"—she

smiled with sudden dazzling charm—"I believe I'm almost pleased to see you! If you were to ask me nicely I believe I'd give you most things—except your freedom."

She laughed again teasingly, and took up the rabbit's foot. "You don't mind if I go on with my toilet, do you? I'm due on in a few moments."

Some one tapped at the door; the maid entered. She looked at Buchanan smilingly, then at her mistress, and held a card to the latter.

Rosa glanced at it and frowned; then she sighed resignedly.

"Show him in," she said.

Roger rose to go as a man appeared in the doorway.

Rosa looked across at him and held out a languid hand.

"How d'ye do! I know your face, but I can't remember your name to save my life. Don't go, Roger," as Buchanan moved; but Roger insisted. When he got outside into the night again he drew a long breath and bared his head to the cool, damp air.

What had he ever seen in her to capture his boyish fancy? What a fool he had been—what a ghastly fool! Of all the headlong passion he had felt for this woman, there was nothing left in his heart now but shame.

SO Louise had been gambling again. In spite of her promise to him when he gave her a check six months ago to clear her debts, she had broken her word, and Cecelie's presence in the house was explained.

Well, she would have to answer to him for it—he did not mean to allow the matter to rest where it was.

It was long past midnight when he got home; there were lights burning, and Philip was in possession of the most comfortable chair.

He got up when his brother came in, looking disturbed.

"I've waited an hour for you," he said with a tinge of anxiety in his voice. "You ought to be in bed, Roger."

Roger threw off his coat and sat down wearily. "What's the matter?" he asked.

Philip fidgeted first on one foot, then on the other.

"I've quarreled with Louise," he said reluctantly. "We went to the theater—Cecelie and I and young Forsyth. Louise wouldn't come." He looked at his brother apprehensively.

"She's been playing again," he added painfully.

Roger made no comment.

"I told her what I thought of her," Philip pursued, "and we had a row. You know what she is. I'm not saying a word against her, mind you, but she's the very devil!" he added with pitiful incongruity.

"She's taken—Miss Vanstone into the house to—to pay her debts, I understand," said Roger after a moment.

Philip flushed.

"How—how did you know?" he asked helplessly. "I never told you. I was most careful not to tell you."

"I know. No, it wasn't you." He stopped; then went on cynically: "My wife very kindly gave me the information."

"Your—your *wife!* Then—then it was you!"

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, some friend of Forsyth's. He went round to the stage door. We were in the theater, and he told us you were there — in Miss Desmond's room."

Roger dropped his head in his hands.

"I tried to pass it off, of course," said Philip nervously. "But it's not

very likely that there are two Roger Buchanans knocking round. I'm sorry, old fellow." He took a turn up and down the room.

"Look here," he said abruptly. "Why not tell Cecelie the truth? It's been a mistake all along to keep her in the dark. She was bound to be miserable either way. Tell her the truth, or I will, if you like."

Roger rose to his feet and stretched his arms wearily above his head. A sudden twinge of fear went through his brother's heart as he realized afresh how ill Roger looked.

"Tell her the truth? That that woman is my wife? That I believed myself madly in love with her?" He dropped back again into his chair. "You mean well, Phil, but it's impossible—quite impossible."

Philip looked irresolute. Suddenly he went to stand beside his brother and laid an arm on his shoulder.

"You'll be sorry all your life if you don't," he said. "She *ought* to be told."

Roger stirred uneasily beneath the kind touch.

"You don't understand," he protested. "Let me manage my own affairs. She cares nothing for me—I'm glad she doesn't. She'll marry some other fellow."

"Yes, that's the devil of it," said Philip.

"What do you mean?" Roger looked up with a sort of fear in his eyes.

It was one thing to talk in the abstract of Cecelie and some other man; but an entirely different thing to know that Philip was already associating her, in thought at least, with some one specific.

"What do you mean?" he asked again sharply.

"I mean," said Philip a little unsteadily, "that young Forsyth, when we came back from the show to-night, asked her to marry him, and—and—"

"Forsyth!" Roger was on his feet now; there was something almost savage in his face. "That *boy?* She'd never look at him! She'd never give a thought to him! She's refused him, of course?"

There was a moment's silence.

"No," said Philip with a sort of desperation. "No, that's just what she hasn't done."

CHAPTER XXV

KATHY'S HELPING HAND

WHEN Rosa Desmond's maid went to prepare her mistress for bed that night she found her sitting by the fire crying.

Rosa did not often cry, except when she got into a temper, when her hysterical outbursts generally ended in tears; but Marie knew that it was not anger to-night that caused this emotion.

Marie began to take down the masses of auburn hair and brush them professionally.

Rosa jerked her head away.

"You hurt me," she said. "You're like a machine."

Marie was used to her mistress's tantrums; after waiting a moment she went on with her task stolidly and without comment.

She did not speak again till she had completed Rosa's toilet; then she turned back the sheets of the bed and paused, looking across at the drooping figure by the fire with a sort of good-natured scorn.

"It's nearly two o'clock, Miss Desmond," she suggested.

"You can go — good night," said Rosa.

She did not look round, and the door closed softly on the maid's trim figure.

Then Rosa got to her feet and walked over to a drawer in the dressing table, which she unlocked.

It was crammed with odds and ends, letters and bills. She was naturally untidy, and now she burrowed beneath the muddle till she found what she wanted—a small cardboard box clasped with an elastic band.

She carried it back to the fire with her, and sat down with it on her knee.

She took off the band, and turned back the lid. A faint perfume of lavender filled the air, and a dried sprig of the little mauve flower tumbled to the silken lap of her dressing gown.

She picked it up curiously, and looked at it for a moment before she flung it from her into the fire.

Then she took the letters out of the box. They were the first love letters she had ever had in her life—and they were all from Roger Buchanan.

They were written in a flowing, boyish hand, and were full of romance, the glamour of a passion that had burned itself out almost before the end of their honeymoon.

She had kept the letters out of a sentimentality which every woman feels for her first lover. Afterward, when they parted, she kept them because she thought they might be useful. She had not looked at them for years—she hardly knew what had driven her thoughts to them to-night of all nights, when she was fresh from her triumph and still glowing with the warmth of thunderous applause.

She slipped one from its envelope and read the first few lines. Her lip curled—he had been very much in love! She wondered spitefully what the stranger woman would say could she have read them—the woman for whose sake Roger had grown so ill-looking and haggard.

Suddenly her eyes clouded over—a tear fell to the rich lace of her gown. It was not the man she was crying for—it was for the past and the lost illusions of her youth!

Nobody wanted her—nobody cared what became of her. If anything were to happen so that she could dance no more, she would have difficulty to find one friend who would offer her sympathy or comradeship.

She hated herself for this sudden depression that had seized her; as a rule she managed to put disagreeable things behind her.

But to-night—this was Rosa Desmond's zero hour as she sat there alone in the silent night, reading the old letters of a man who had long since grown to hate her and wish her dead.

The first gray finger of dawn was creeping over the sleeping metropolis when at last she got into bed.

SHE woke late in the morning, to find Marie standing by her bedside with a sheaf of papers and her morning coffee.

Rosa drank the coffee thirstily, but merely glanced at the papers. She knew she had been a success; she could afford to pass over the eager eulogy of the press.

"No letters?" she asked.

Marie silently pointed to a budget on the quilt. Rosa caught them up eagerly and scanned each envelope, then threw them aside carelessly.

She wondered why she had expected one from Roger Buchanan. It was so unlikely that he would ever write to her again; she was a fool to give him a thought. He hated her; he wished

she was dead—and yet—all the time she was being dressed, she thought of him, and the hard reproach of his thin face.

She was thinking of him when, later, she went out into the golden October sunshine. He had looked ill—he had never been strong—she did not want him to die.

Over and over again in her head went the three little phrases. She wondered with a sense of irritation why she could not rid herself of the thought of him.

She did not wish to be a nuisance to him—and yet—she did not wish him to love another woman, or think of marrying again.

Her face grew sullen at the thought. Who was this girl who had dared to win his love? Some adventuress, no doubt.

She never *would* be his wife; there was only one Mrs. Roger Buchanan—herself! There should never be another.

The old dog-in-the-manger spirit drove away her repentant remorse of the previous night; there was something vixenish in her beautiful eyes as she walked on. She hoped Roger *would* die—she would be glad to hear of his death.

People stared after her; one or two, recognizing her, whispered together excitedly. She was unconscious of the admiration she excited; she was lost in a world of her own bitter thoughts and imaginings.

As she stepped off the curb to cross the busy street a dozen voices shouted at her. Some one grabbed her roughly by the arm and she felt herself hauled unceremoniously back to the sidewalk.

"You might have been killed," said a girl's frightened voice in her ear.

Rosa looked round angrily. She hated being startled, and her arm ached where it had been roughly grasped. She saw a very commonplace girl, dressed cheaply. Rosa stared at her with a frown.

Her first thought was that the face was hopelessly plain and unattractive; her next that the eyes were kind and honest.

"I suppose I ought to thank you," she said ungraciously. She laughed all at once, showing her dimples and beautiful teeth. "Goodness! How pleased somebody would have been if I *had* been killed!" she said.

The girl frowned.

"It would have been your own fault," she said bluntly. "You stepped off the curb without looking where you were going. You were nearly under a taxi."

She half turned to walk away.

Rosa stopped her.

"I really am very much obliged to you," she said. "Don't be angry with me." The velvety brown eyes were irresistible; the girl unbent sufficiently to smile.

"I'm not angry," she said. "I am glad I was here."

Her plain face openly expressed her admiration of the other's beauty. Suddenly a gleam of recognition flashed into her eyes.

"Why, you're Miss Desmond, aren't you?" she asked eagerly. "I was reading all about you this morning—I'd know you anywhere by your photographs."

Rosa beamed; this form of admiration always appealed to her.

"I'm Rosa Desmond, all right," she said. "Won't you tell me your name, too?"

The girl hesitated.

"Well," she said at last, rather nervously. "My real name is Kathleen

Smith, but most people call me 'Kathy.'"

CHAPTER XXVI

ROGER SEEKS AN INTERVIEW

CECELIE spent the night following Donald Forsyth's proposal of marriage sitting huddled in the big chair in her bedroom.

She had taken off her dinner gown and slipped into a loose dressing jacket. In spite of Louise's suggestion that she should have a maid, she had refused—she said frankly that she had never been used to it, and much preferred waiting upon herself.

She took her hair down now, and brushed it, leaving it tumbled about her shoulders.

Already she was hating and despising herself for the momentary weakness she had shown Forsyth. Where were all her fine resolutions — where her strength of will, that she should break down so hopelessly at the first meeting with Buchanan?

The burst of weeping in the drawing-room had done her good; the tears had seemed to wash some of the hard resentment from her heart. Forsyth had been kind and gentle to her—at sight of her grief he had forgotten himself and been like a fond elder brother.

She had said she would marry him—she must have been mad! The blood rushed to her face now in a sort of shamed anger.

She did not care for him—he was no more to her than any other man she had met since she came to live under the Buchanans' roof. She did not want to marry—it was cruel of her to have allowed him to hope.

She would never marry him — she would never marry any one. She tried to remember what she actually had promised—but her head ached, and thoughts would not come consecutively.

She could only think of Roger Buchanan—of the way he had looked at her—of the fact that he had gone behind the stage to visit Rosa Desmond.

Cecelie was not a jealous girl by nature; as a rule she thought sufficiently well of herself to be above such pettiness; but to-night she seemed to have lost her mental balance. She saw everything distorted and out of proportion; she felt as if the whole world were ranged against her in enmity.

She longed for Kathy's kind, comforting presence; for her equable common sense—Kathy, who was never upset, who always held such a sensible, matter-of-fact view of life!

But even Kathy seemed to have forgotten her; her letters were few and far between, the interests of her new life and surroundings had crowded out other things. Cecelie felt bitterly that her friend no longer loved her in the same way.

It has been truly said that there is no man or woman so poor as the one who has only money. Cecelie was realizing this now as she sat in the maddening silence of the night, broken only by the slow "tick-tock" of the clock.

She looked back with passionate regret to the days that had been happy in spite of their monotony at Mrs. Wrigley's.

Here she had money, beautiful clothes, admiration, and all the things she had longed for—but not a single moment's real happiness.

She had made a hopeless muddle of her life, and she had meant to be so clever—so clever!

It seemed a lifetime ago since that hot summer's afternoon when she had railed against the Buchanans in the hotel at Newquay. She recalled her arrogant angry words to Kathy—her curses had indeed come home to roost!

She dozed off at last in the big chair; it was full daylight in the luxurious room when she awoke.

She breakfasted alone; Louise seldom appeared till the middle of the morning. The butler informed her that Philip had not been home all night; he explained, in answer to her look of surprise, that he believed his master was at Mr. Roger's.

CECELIE did not know how to pass the morning. She wrote to Kathy, and also to Forsyth, asking him to keep her half promise a secret for the moment; she begged him not to come to see her that day, saying that she wanted time to think things over.

She sent the letter by hand, but apparently Forsyth had started before it reached him, for an hour before lunch he was shown into the morning room where she was trying to read.

When she heard the bell her pulses leaped; she was sure it must be Roger. She did not know the strained eagerness of her face as the door opened.

Forsyth saw it and took its meaning to himself. When the door had closed behind him, he came eagerly forward.

He was a very nice looking boy; Cecelie felt a twinge of compunction as she saw the light in his eyes.

She rose to her feet unconsciously moving back a step.

"I sent you a letter this morning," she said quickly.

He stopped.

"I didn't get it—I left early—"

Cecelie rushed on:

"I asked you not to come; I asked you to let me have time to think things over. I ought not to have said what I did last night, but I was tired and upset—" She forced a smile. "Things all look so different in the morning sunlight," she added painfully.

His face changed. "You mean that you do not love me?"

She shook her head gently. "I told you that last night; I don't think I am the sort of woman who could ever really love — not as some people do! Oh, don't be angry with me—if you'll just have a little patience things will be all right—but I want to be left alone just now — everything seems so strange—"

"I want you to please yourself in everything," he said quickly. "I know I'm not half good enough for you. I've nothing to offer you except my love—" He tried to smile; it was rather a pathetic attempt.

"I've been thinking since last night that it was awful presumption on my part ever to have spoken to you," he went on; "but I *do* love you! If you hadn't a penny in the world I should still love you—it would make no difference."

"I know—I am sure of that."

He lifted her reluctant hand and kissed it softly.

"Thank you, darling," he said humbly.

She bit her lip; a traitorous memory had flashed to her mind of the night on the cliffs at Newquay when Roger Buchanan had broken down all her objections, and forced her to admit that she loved him.

All along she had *wanted* him to overrule her—she had longed for him to prove himself her master. She knew afterward how feeble had been her stronghold of refusal—how glad-

ly she had surrendered — and with what disastrous results!

He had taken the city of her heart, and broken his pledge of faith—he had trampled her under his feet.

She drew away from Forsyth with a little shudder. She wished he would go away and leave her—she wished he had not kissed her hand—the soft touch of his lips seemed to melt the hardness of her heart, and she *wanted* to be hard.

She wanted to kill all feeling, all softening—she wanted to go her way down the path of pitiless revenge without a hand stretched to check her purpose.

She felt as if she were only living to avenge herself on Roger Buchanan—her momentary weakness at sight of him seemed now to have strengthened her determination.

She hated him—she *would* hate him—she *wanted* to see him suffer!

It is strange how a woman can force herself into a certain belief. Cecelie would have said at that moment had she been asked, without the slightest hesitation, that Buchanan was less to her than the dust beneath her feet.

Forsyth lingered a few moments longer; he had the tact not to press his suit further. He talked on ordinary topics; he spoke of his car; he asked when she would go out with him.

He spoke of Rosa Desmond and her wonderful dancing of the previous evening. Only just when he took his leave his eyes grew wistful; he held her hand tightly for an instant.

"Good-by," he said. "And God bless you."

He walked away without another word. Cecelie followed him into the hall; she felt, somehow, sorry for him. She wished she had told him straight out that there was not the least hope for him; but she had not the courage. This man was kind to her; he was some one to turn to, and she wanted a friend so badly.

CECELIE half sighed as she went back to the morning room. He was a good fellow; he would make some woman a devoted husband.

She took up her book again and tried to read. Presently Louise rustled downstairs.

She looked fretful and worried. She said that Robbie was ill with a feverish cold.

"He's always ill," she declared irritably. "And he gets enough care and attention, goodness knows. He's one continual worry to me. I should go mad if anything happened to him."

She went over to the escritoire and began writing letters. From time to time she looked up and flung a comment to Cecelie. Once she asked where her husband was, and inquired if Roger had been in that morning.

"I haven't seen him," said Cecelie carelessly. "But a man Mr. Forsyth met in the theater last night said that he was round to the dressing room behind the stage with Rosa Desmond, the dancer. I suppose he is another of her admirers, and I don't wonder at it. She is most beautiful."

Louise swung round in her chair and stared at Cecelie.

"You saw Rosa Desmond last night?" she ejaculated.

"Yes. Mr. Forsyth had a box. That was where we went. You would have enjoyed it; she danced magnificently."

"I saw the creature dance once at Newquay," she said thoughtlessly.

"At Newquay!" echoed Cecelie in surprise. "This summer?"

"Yes." Louise looked annoyed;

she could have bitten her tongue out with anger at her own slip. "She was on at a small entertainment we went to with the Smees one night—a very poor show. I was amazed to hear she was appearing in town."

She took up her pen again as if to intimate that the conversation was at an end, but Cecelie sat looking before her with far-away eyes.

Rosa Desmond had danced at Newquay. Had Roger seen her there, and if so, was that partly the reason of his sudden change toward her? Had this woman's great beauty captured his fancy even then? A wave of bitterness swept through her very soul.

Louise glanced at her anxiously.

"It's the Smees' bridge this afternoon," she said suddenly. "You don't play bridge, do you?"

"No," said Cecelie. "I never had the opportunity to learn," she added.

Louise blotted the letter before her.

"Well, we must teach you," she said briskly. "Mrs. Smee makes quite an income out of it. She's a good player, but she has tremendous luck as well. I can't stand the woman myself, she's so hopelessly plebeian."

Cecelie was used to this sort of conversation. She hardly listened. She was thinking of the long afternoon that stretched before her, wondering what she would do with herself.

Suddenly she thought of Kathy; she sat up with energy.

"Would you mind if I had a friend to tea?" she asked.

Louise shook her head.

"My dear, by all means." She went on scribbling; after a moment she swung round. "Cecelie, if Roger should ask you — I don't suppose he will — but if he does, don't tell him what our little arrangement is; do you mind? Thanks so much," she added effusively as Cecelie assented. "I don't suppose he's likely to ask, but I thought I'd just mention it. Thanks, so much."

Cecelie left the room and went into the library to the telephone. She rang up the hospital and left a message for Kathy, knowing that she had a couple of hours off that afternoon.

LUNCH passed uneventfully. Philip came in looking sulky. He hardly spoke to his wife, and even Cecelie could not cheer him. As soon as he finished his meal he vanished again. Louise went off to her bridge.

Cecelie went upstairs to change her frock. She put on the least smart one of the many she possessed, and did her hair in the way Kathy liked. She felt quite excited at the thought of seeing her old friend again.

Kathy arrived punctually at three. Cecelie came running down the stairs to meet her.

"I've been watching for you from the window," she said eagerly.

The two girls kissed one another heartily, much to the private amusement of the stolid faced butler. Cecelie had an arm around Kathy as she led her upstairs.

"What a lovely house!" said Kathy breathlessly. "I never saw anything like it in all my life. Aren't you frightfully happy here, Cecelie?"

Cecelie laughed ruefully.

"I'm afraid I'm not. At least—oh, I don't want to talk about myself. I want to hear all about you. Take off your coat. We shall be all by ourselves this afternoon; Louise has gone out to gamble—"

"Do you call her Louise?" asked Kathy, round eyed.

Cecelie laughed.

"Yes. It seems absurd, doesn't it,

after the way we hated one another at Newquay? But it's only a matter of form. You see, she doesn't want any one to know I'm a P. G.—paying guest that means—so she passes me off as a distant connection."

"Oh!" Kathy had taken off the felt hat and was raking her unlovely hair with Cecelie's comb.

"I have to do my hair this way now," she apologized, seeing Cecelie's eye upon the inartistic knob at the back of her head. "The nurse's cap wouldn't go on decently any other way."

"It looks very nice," said Cecelie kindly. "I'd like to see you in your uniform."

"I wish you could come to the hospital some day," said Kathy. "All the patients would fall in love with you. Cecelie, have you had any proposals yet?"

"One," said Cecelie flippantly. "He's very nice—Donald Forsyth. I told you about him. And I believe he's really very fond of me; but he hasn't any money—not that that matters, as I have so much. But I don't want to get married," she added rather constrainedly.

Kathy had taken a stopper from one of the silver bottles on the dressing table and was sniffing the perfume.

"How lovely," she said. "May I have some?"

"Of course."

Kathy produced a clean handkerchief, carefully folded into squares, and gingerly dropped a spot or two on to the white linen.

"I'm not allowed to use this in the hospital," she explained. "But I can put it away in my drawer, and it will scent all my clothing a little." She looked around the room.

"Do you like it?" asked Cecelie carelessly; she had long since grown used to the expensive furniture and luxurious appointments.

"I think it's gorgeous," Kathy agreed. "But I'd feel miserable here myself. Our rooms at the hospital are quite bare—just a bed and what's necessary—and spotlessly clean."

"If you're ready we'll go downstairs," said Cecelie. "I told them to let us have tea as soon as you came, so that we can sit over it as long as we like. Do you have to go back early?"

"I must be in at five."

They went downstairs arm in arm, Kathy stopping at every other step to admire.

Tea was served in the drawing-room. Masses of roses filled a huge bowl on the table where Roger Buchanan's portrait stood. Cecelie wondered if Kathy would notice it; she herself was always keenly alive to its presence whenever she entered the room.

Kathy made a slow circle of the room; she admired everything separately, speaking in an awed voice as if she were in church.

She came to the table with its bowl of roses last, and Cecelie looked up nervously. Kathy was standing quite still, her eyes fixed on the portrait of Roger Buchanan, and there was something wistful in her expression.

CECELIE began to pour.

Kathy stood there so long that the silence became unbearable. Cecelie spoke suddenly.

"What are you looking at? Oh! Mr. Buchanan's portrait."

She felt that if she did not force herself to speak of him now she would never be able to do so later; and she wanted to make Kathy believe that she had quite—*quite* forgotten.

"Rather a good likeness, isn't it?" she went on lightly. "He's home again, you know—he came in here yesterday."

"Oh, Cecelie!"

Cecelie nodded; she held the silver sugar tongs poised above Kathy's cup.

"Two lumps, isn't it?" she asked. She knew quite well that Kathy always took three, but she felt she must say something or scream.

"Three," said Kathy stolidly. "Four, if they're very small," she added as an afterthought.

She moved away from Buchanan's portrait reluctantly, and came to sit down by the fire.

"Did you speak to him?"

"Speak to him? Of course I did! We had quite a long conversation. He has been ill, and looks quite thin."

"Oh, Cecelie!" Kathy did not know what to make of her friend. She was thinking of that time following their return from Newquay, of Cecelie lying white and broken hearted, hardly speaking.

Could one forget so soon? she asked herself wistfully. And yet Cecelie looked happy and well—there were no signs of heartbreak in her radiant face. In spite of herself, she felt somehow horribly sorry for Buchanan.

"I couldn't believe it at first—when you said you were coming to this house," she said slowly after a moment. "There must have been heaps of other women who would have been only too glad to have any one like you—so rich and so beautiful! I'd rather have died than have anything to do with Mrs. Buchanan—I hate her," said Kathy calmly. "She used to look at us as if we were dirt. It would choke me to eat food in her house, if I were you."

"You don't suppose *I* love her, do you?" asked Cecelie rather fiercely. "But it suits me to be here. It—oh, you don't understand!"

Kathy felt shocked; for almost the first time in her life she condemned her friend. In her heart she blamed Cecelie terribly, but she was too loyal to allow a word of it to pass her lips.

Cecelie leaned forward suddenly.

"I suppose you wouldn't understand if I told you that I was just here for—*revenge,* would you?" she asked slowly.

Kathy stared; her mouth was full, and for a moment speech was impossible.

All at once Cecelie sprang to her feet. She went over to the fireplace and rested her arm along the mantel, bowing her forehead to it.

"I know you'll think me terribly wicked," she said with a hard laugh. "You're such a nice little soul—you couldn't understand how I feel. But I want to *hurt* him—I want to make him feel as he made me—I want to see him look as I know *I* did that morning when—" She stopped, the slim hand hanging at her side clenched suddenly.

Kathy took another bite of cake.

"I thought you had more sense." she said calmly.

Cecelie laughed — the commonplace words seemed to have broken the tragic tension. She came back to the tea table.

"And now tell me about yourself," she said a little unsteadily. "I'm tired of my own affairs; tell me what you have been doing."

Kathy gave homy little stories of the other nurses; of the patients, of one who had died—and here Kathy wept unrestrainedly for a moment.

"You'll get used to deaths in time, dear," said Cecelie, trying to comfort. "And it's a great thing to have the

nerve to be able to stand by and help them die as easily as possible, poor souls!"

Kathy dried her eyes — tears with her were like April showers, soon over. She stuffed her handkerchief away and took another piece of cake.

"It's the third I've had," she apologized. "But I do love chocolate cake. Oh!"—she broke off as a sudden thought flashed across her mind—"I nearly forgot to tell you about my adventure!"

"Your adventure?"

"Yes."

Kathy looked very pleased and important. "Have you ever heard of Rosa Desmond, the dancer?" she asked.

CECELIE frowned; she wondered why it was that this woman's name so persistently haunted her. There seemed something fateful about it.

"I saw her dance last night," she said reluctantly. "Mr. Forsyth had tickets. She's very beautiful! I — I enjoyed it very much."

"I've never seen her dance," Kathy said. "But I've spoken to her." She narrated the circumstances.

"How strange!" said Cecelie. "And she was really nice to you, and grateful?"

"She was afterward; she was a little cross at first—I'm afraid I hurt her arm. She said she liked my face." Kathy blushed ingenuously. "Then she asked would I come to see her some day? Wasn't it kind of her? And she's going to send me two tickets for one of her shows. I'll take Nurse Fowler—she's the one I like best of all. Wasn't it kind of Miss Desmond?"

"Very. Is she as pretty off the stage as she is on?"

"*I* think she's simply lovely—such beautiful eyes and such lovely hair! She didn't look very happy, though—and she said such a funny thing when I pulled her back on the sidewalk—I am sure she was thinking of some man who had got tired of her—at least, it sounded like that."

"What did she say?"

"She said: 'Wouldn't some one have been pleased if I *had* been killed?'—and then she laughed."

"Poor soul!" said Cecelie. "Shall you go to see her, Kathy?"

"I think so; wouldn't you?"

"Of course. You'd enjoy it. And you'll tell me all about her, won't you, and what she says to you?"

"I'll tell her about you, too; and about all that's happened since we went to Newquay — really, it's just like a book when you think about it, isn't it, Cecelie?"

Cecelie had paled.

"I hate having my affairs talked about," she said sharply. "It can be of no interest to Miss Desmond to know that I was made a fool of and thrown over."

"Cecelie, you know I'd never tell her that! I only meant to tell her that you were my best friend; and about your father coming back after all those years, and leaving you all his money. I thought it would be something to say; you know I never can talk to strangers—but I won't tell her if you'd rather I didn't," she added.

Cecelie left her chair and came to sit beside Kathy.

"You can tell her what you like," she said. "You're a dear, and I love you!" She bent and kissed her.

"You don't love me as much as I love you," said Kathy, her eyes shining.

They stayed talking so long that in

the end Kathy had to rush off in a hurry. It was ten minutes to five when she came downstairs in her street things; she looked anxiously at the clock.

"You'll do it, all right, in a taxi," said Cecelie. "I'll pay, of course. James will call one."

The butler hurriedly obeyed; the two girls stood waiting in the hall.

"I've enjoyed myself so much," said Kathy. "Ask me to come again, won't you? But not when Mrs. Buchanan is in," she added in an undertone. "I simply couldn't bring myself to speak to her—or to *any* of them, for that matter."

Some one came slowly up the steps and through the open front door; the two girls did not see him till he was close to them. Then Cecelie turned.

She gave an almost imperceptible start and bit her lip—then she went forward carelessly.

"Oh, good afternoon! There is nobody at home but me."

Kathy swung around sharply, her kindly face hardening, for the man standing there was no other than Roger Buchanan.

For a moment she looked at him—*through* him — then she turned again to Cecelie.

"Good-by, darling!" she said. "And thank you so much."

She swept past Buchanan as if she had not seen him, and ran down the steps to the waiting taxi. Kathy, at least, had the courage of her convictions, and was not going to recognize a man she believed had done his best to ruin her dearest friend's life.

There was a little silence after she had gone. Buchanan looked white; the cut direct from Kathy had hurt him more than he had believed possible. Cecelie apologized laughingly.

"Please forgive her — but she's so fond of me, you see, and I can't make her understand that our little friendship down at Newquay was only a flirtation. She ought not to have cut you—it was silly and unnecessary."

She turned away as if the matter were of small moment; her foot was on the bottom step when Buchanan moved after her.

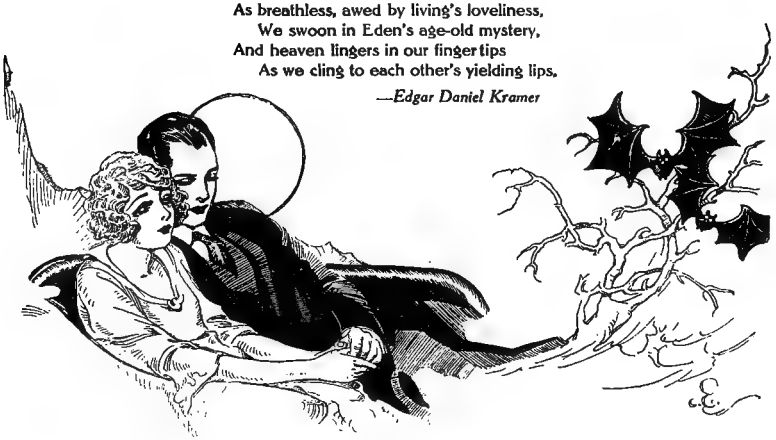
His face looked drawn and ill; there were dark splashes beneath his eyes, as if he had not slept.

"Can you spare me a moment?" he asked. "I want to speak to you."

HALLOWE'EN

WHILE ghosts and goblins haunt the wind-blown night,
While witches dance fantastic rigadoons,
Or ride their broomsticks in the eerie light
That mystically veils the stars and moons,
Where yellow jack-o'-lanterns softly gleam
Across the darkness of the noisy room,
Forgotten by the crowd, we find our dream,
As we lean close within the joy-filled gloom,
For oh, our hands touch in a shy caress,
And we grow tremulous with ecstasy,
As breathless, awed by living's loveliness,
We swoon in Eden's age-old mystery,
And heaven lingers in our fingertips
As we cling to each other's yielding lips.

—Edgar Daniel Kramer



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Sue was fascinated by the diamond's sparkle. "Park it for me, will you?" said the other. "I don't want the guy I'm going out with to know I'm engaged"

The Loaned Engagement Ring

By JOHANNA DOUGLASS

SUE SHIRLEY had just unscrambled the keys of her typewriter for the hundredth time when Crissy Ellis breezed in upon her. "Breezed" is the word, for Crissy didn't bother to knock; she simply flung the door wide and gushed in, blonde, perfumed and effusive.

"Hello, honey!" she greeted Sue in her sweet but rather affected voice. "Would you mind keeping my engagement ring again? I have good reasons for not wearing it to-night, and I don't want to leave it in my room."

Sue surveyed her fluffy, somewhat plump visitor with mild amusement. She didn't approve of this fickle, gold-digging neighbor of hers, but, after all, she reflected, if Crissy chooses to "two-time" her boy friend that's her own business. Besides, Sue loved the ring for its own sparkling beauty.

She held out the third finger of her left hand, little dreaming the anxiety and worry that diamond-set bauble would cause her before morning.

As Crissy transferred it from her own hand to Sue's, she winked one of her large eyes and purred: "There are times, my dear, when smart little girls leave their engagement rings at home."

Sue held her hand under the desk lamp and watched the lights flash in the depths of the big blue solitaire.

"Going out with some big butter-and-egg man?" she asked idly.

An odd, knowing smirk crossed Crissy's doll-like features and she

tossed her peroxide curls self-consciously.

"You'd be surprised, big girl!" she retorted, and then, with seeming casualness: "Has Hobart called up yet? This is his usual night, isn't it?"

"Oh, Hobart!" laughed Sue. "He'll be along in about an hour. It isn't quite seven yet."

Again that expression of secret amusement touched Crissy's face—a smug sort of cat-swallowed-the-canary smile.

"Well, so long, honey," she said jauntily. "I must be shoving off. Take good care of my sparkler."

Sue tried to concentrate on her work, but a disturbing imp of discontent had slipped into the background of her mind and refused to be dismissed. She felt tired and a little fed-up with the everlasting sameness of things.

She had typed all day, copying the dry-as-dust rough drafts of Hughes & Hughes, Court Reporters. At five o'clock she had snatched a bite to eat and come back again to the grind, for she was paid by the thousand words and she needed a great deal of money to carry out a magnificent plan that was in her curly black head.

In spite of her determination to keep her attention on the penciled notes beside her typewriter, her thoughts would suddenly go wool-gathering. Entrancing visions of palm-fringed islands would float before her eyes, silvery South Seas beaches, dancing natives—and then her flying fingers would miss their aim and the keys pile up in a jumble.

The single window of the plain little room overlooked the city, and the faint strains of dance music from a neighboring roof garden mingled disturbingly with the clatter of her machine. Sue loved to dance. Too, the soft breeze that fluttered her chintz curtains carried with it a hint of romance from the May night outside.

And Sue was fashioned for romance from the top of her dark curly bob to the tips of her slender feet. Her clear eyes were shadowed by long black lashes and were of the shade known to the colored folk as "jet blue," And she had the slim, graceful figure that caused men to stare as she passed them on the street and stare again.

But Sue's romanticism was more than skin deep. She had long dreamed of a voyage to the South Seas; who has not? But with her it was no mere daydream, for she had taken practical measures to realize her ambition, and now she was almost in sight of her goal. By doing this extra typing at night she had, in two years, earned almost five hundred dollars—the price of a much-advertised cruise, embracing the Marquesas, Tahiti, and the romance-washed shores of Pago Pago itself.

SUE covered her typewriter at seven thirty and started to make her toilette. Hobart Buckley boasted the same punctuality in his social affairs that he observed in his flourishing law practice, and he had never been late. He was from the same small Mid-Western town as Sue, and their Wednesday night engagements had been established upon her arrival in Washington the year before. And although he was far from her idea of a plumed knight, she looked forward to his arrival eagerly.

The music from the roof garden had got into her blood and her trim feet kept time with its lively rhythm as she hurriedly changed to her single evening frock, a filmy affair of midnight-blue lace.

As she pulled and patted the material snugly into place over the soft curves of her girlish figure she studied the effect in her mirror. The rich hue of the dress accentuated the creamy whiteness of her skin and tinted her black brows and hair with purple shadows.

Even her deep blue eyes grew darker and they danced with sudden mischief as she noticed the diamond on her finger, shimmering up at her like a magic flame. It will be amusing, she thought, to let Hobart think I am really engaged.

Then the telephone bell rang and her plans for the evening went crashing. Hobart, it seemed, was sick. He was telling her, in a weak, far-away voice that he had a fever and would be unable to leave his apartment.

In spite of her disappointment she was genuinely sympathetic over the phone, thinking only of his discomfort. But once the receiver was back on the hook she almost wept.

"All dressed up and no place to go!" she said dolefully, and there was a lump in her throat that would not down, for, after all, Sue was but a girl.

Just outside were all the beckoning mysteries of a sweet spring night, and when one is young she cannot live entirely for a vision of distant South Seas, no matter how vivid her imagination may be.

She wandered about the drab little room disconsolately; considered getting back to her typing, and rejected the idea violently; stood for a time at the open window looking wistfully out into the luminous darkness.

A full moon had risen and the city was bathed in its white radiance. The warm wind fanned her senses with the seductive fragrance of growing things. The music across the way pulsed and sobbed some tuneful plaint of spring and love.

A maddening hunger tormented her, an aching loneliness, a desperate yearning to share in the night's glamorous promise. With a sudden irresistible impulse she went over to her wardrobe, snatched up a light wrap and a close-fitting hat and fled from the stuffy room.

By chance, or perhaps habit, she directed her steps toward the theater district. She had walked rapidly, unthinkingly, seeking only to quench the unrest that tormented her spirit.

But as the bright lights of the movie houses blazed in upon her consciousness she slowed her pace and considered what to do next.

She could not go on striding endlessly up and down the streets in an evening frock, and returning to her room in the present mood was unthinkable.

She had paused for a moment in the milling crowd about the foyer of the Fox Theater to read the announcements on the signs beside the entrance when she sighted Crissy near the box office.

Her blond head was tilted back and she was talking animatedly to a large man at her side. "The big butter-and-egg man," thought Sue, glancing at his broad back in idle curiosity.

Then she gasped, hardly crediting her eyes. But as the man half turned and exposed his profile to the naked overhead lights she no longer had room for doubt. It was none other than the supposedly ill Hobart.

As the full significance of her discovery dawned upon her, Sue moved unseeingly back toward the curb, stunned and sick at heart.

Not that she loved Hobart, but he

had been a friend of long standing—one who had a dozen times professed undying devotion to her, the only man whom she had ever admitted into the full confidence of her comradeship.

She felt cheapened, humiliated and desperately hurt. The fact that she had introduced him to Crissy and that Crissy was her near neighbor added insult to injury—put her in a particularly ignominious position. Doubtless they had been highly amused with their little conspiracy against her.

Heedless of where she was going, she unexpectedly stepped over the curb, floundered for a moment, and fell to the pavement directly in the path of a huge red sedan.

Its brakes shrieked futilely. Robbed of the power of movement, terrified, she watched it bear down upon her.

Suddenly a long, lean figure leaped toward her from the crowd on the sidewalk, and even as she tensed her body against the crushing shock of the car a powerful arm swept her out of harm's way.

For a moment she lay limp and dazed in her rescuer's arms. Her first conscious impression was of his eyes, deep and wide-set, gazing down at her from beneath their level brows with kindly solicitude. His face was lean, his features cleanly chiseled and vital. He was bareheaded and, to Sue's wavering vision, his hair seemed like the close-lying bronze curls of a Greek statue.

She was oblivious of the pushing, goggle-eyed crowd; found nothing odd in the fact that a strange young man was cradling her in his arms as if she had been a baby instead of a woman grown.

She stared up at him with the dreamy bewilderment of returning consciousness, her eyes dark pools in her white face. And then memory flashed back and faint color crept up to the roots of her tumbled black hair.

"Thank you," she murmured in confusion. "I'm all right now."

He carefully lowered her feet to the sidewalk, but still kept a supporting arm about her waist.

"Are you with some one?" he asked, and Sue could not fail to note that his voice was deep and agreeable. But she had grown keenly aware of the curiously staring crowd, and the situation was becoming embarrassing.

"Why, no, but I—I—" she stammered.

"Let me help you out of here then," he interrupted understandingly, and, still shielding her with a competent arm, pushed his way through the crowd.

AS they walked up the street away from the crowded area Sue felt that her mishap could no longer justify the presence of her escort. Yet she hesitated to dismiss him. She liked the gentle pressure of his hand on her arm; found a strange exhilaration in his nearness.

"I guess I owe you my life," she faltered. "And I'm deeply grateful to you, but I—I think I'll be able to get along by myself now."

The man looked down at her and smiled whimsically.

"Your life must be of some value to you. Surely you're not going to dismiss me without some reward."

Sue studied his face from beneath her long lashes. He is teasing me, she decided, and an imp of mischief shone in her shadowed blue eyes.

"I am not wealthy," she retorted with pretended seriousness. "But if you will tell me what you wish I'll see what I can do about it."

"Nothing could be fairer than that," he agreed and seemed to consider the matter gravely. "Let's see now; the night is young and practically perfect." He indicated the round white moon with a wide gesture and sniffed the spring-scented air appreciatively. "But it's the kind of night that will be a total loss unless you help me enjoy it. Let me take you to the tallest roof garden in town?"

Sue felt it would be ungracious to refuse him, and she longed to accept for her own sake. But going to a roof garden or any other place, for that matter, with a strange young man was among the things she had never done. She was on the point of shaking her head regretfully when she surprised an expression on his face that made her hesitate—a desperate earnestness that belied the light gayety of his voice and manner.

After all, she thought, it could do no great harm, and if she refused she would never see him again. She was surprised to find herself suddenly panic-stricken at the thought that this man, whose name she didn't even know, might so easily slip back out of her life. She smiled up at him.

"I'll be glad to go with you," she said.

In this whimsical, haphazard and wholly illogical manner Sue opened the gate of friendship to young Bob Lee. Doubtless the gods of convention shook their heads in disapproval and croaked, "It's agin' the rules and no good can come of it." But romance and adventure must sometimes have their way despite these ancient crape hangers.

They found a little table high atop the Powhatan Roof. The waiter apologized because it was in a hedge-bordered corner, partially secluded from the dance floor and orchestra by a flowering shrub. But Sue was enchanted. A small candle lamp threw a rosy glow over the white napery and silver and lent the leafy nook an air of coziness—an intimate and personal touch.

As though in honor of their arrival, the orchestra struck up a dreamy waltz and one by one the huge frosted lights set at regular intervals around the edge of the roof blinked out. From all about them came a hubbub of scraping chairs, laughing voices, and rustling silks as eager young couples threaded their way between the tables toward the moonlit dance floor.

Sue regarded the scene with shining eyes. Surely this was some elfin frolic, high up under the stars. Hundreds of small table lights winked through their screening foliage like yellow fireflies. Dark figures filled the shadows with joyous movement, and the whole was silhouetted against a radiant silver background of moonlight. Tremulous with the sweet magic of it all, she lifted her face to her companion.

"Lovely," she breathed softly. "Perfect." Her dark eyes glowed.

He smiled at her quizzically, his eyes soft.

"Like it?" he asked. "Shall we dance this one, Beautiful?"

Sue nodded her assent. She could not find it in her heart to resent his familiarity. She knew that he was not being flippant, but rather admiring. Already she thought of him as "Bob," but they hadn't yet reached the first-name stage. In fact she hadn't told him her name at all, in spite of his repeated urgings.

How tall and strong he looked as he moved beside her. She followed his clean, crisp profile upward to his eager eyes, gay and tender in the

moonlight, and then turned away in sudden shyness. A strange emotion was filling her breast—a delicious, flooding warmth that she had never before experienced.

Once again his arm was about her, and this time she was far from unconscious of it. Her heart throbbed in joyful rhythm with the music as they swung and swayed across the polished floor.

DURING one of the orchestra's intermissions he was again pleading with her to tell him her name. As he became more insistent she had taken refuge in teasing him about his own. Of course she intended to tell him eventually, but in the meantime their fencing provided an amusing and safe topic of conversation to cover up her slight self-consciousness.

"So your name is Robert E. Lee." she smiled mischievously across the narrow table. "Well, I'll be Martha Washington." She reached idly across the table to rearrange a flower that had partially fallen from its slender glass vase, and the big solitaire on her finger glittered under the lamp.

"Have a heart," he pleaded. "I can't go on calling you 'say' and—" He stopped short as he saw the flashing gem and looked sharply at her. "You are engaged?" It sounded like an accusation.

"Suppose I am!" she retorted and could have bitten out her tongue as she saw the dismay on his face. She had completely forgotten she was wearing Crissy's ring, and in her confusion had said the first thing that popped into her head.

The gayety left his eyes and their gray depths cooled to a stare.

What have I done? thought Sue remorsefully, and she would have cried out the truth but for the subtle barrier he had suddenly raised against her.

"It is an oddly cut stone," he said formally. "Might I examine it?"

"Certainly." Sue twisted the ring from her finger and handed it to him, hurt and a little annoyed at his sudden stiffness.

He looked the ring over, weighed it in his palm for a moment, and then handed it back.

"Diamonds are like women," he said. "They sparkle, but they are hard and full of deceit."

She had an impulse to blurt out the truth, to try to reëstablish their happy camaraderie. But she was hurt, and more than a little proud. Instead of answering she turned her head and pretended interest in the street lights far below. There was a lump in her throat and the yellow lamps were blurred by the moisture in her eyes.

Then the orchestra blared forth in a foot-shuffling fox trot, and Bob rose to his feet.

"Let's dance!" he cried, and she turned to find him smiling again. But there was a forced note in his merriment, and throughout the dance and its encores Sue had a feeling that he was turning over some troublesome problem in his mind.

Some of the night's magic seemed to have vanished; the girl's heart was heavy. As they were returning to their table she decided to swallow her pride and end their wordless quarrel by confessing the truth about the ring. She should never have said what she had.

So when they were seated she smiled across into his eyes and stretched her left hand out on the table as though to call on the solitaire to confirm her words. For a moment she stared down blankly, and then the color drained slowly from her face.

Crissy's diamond was gone! Unbelievable but true. The empty prongs of its setting pointed upward in mute but positive testimony of their loss.

"Gone!" she gasped. "Gone! It is gone!" She raised her white, distressed face to meet Bob's steady regard. His gray eyes seemed to study her thoughtfully — appraise her — search for an answer to some bewildering problem.

"Don't you understand?" she cried. "The diamond is gone!"

THEIR waiter suddenly materialized from behind the foliage.

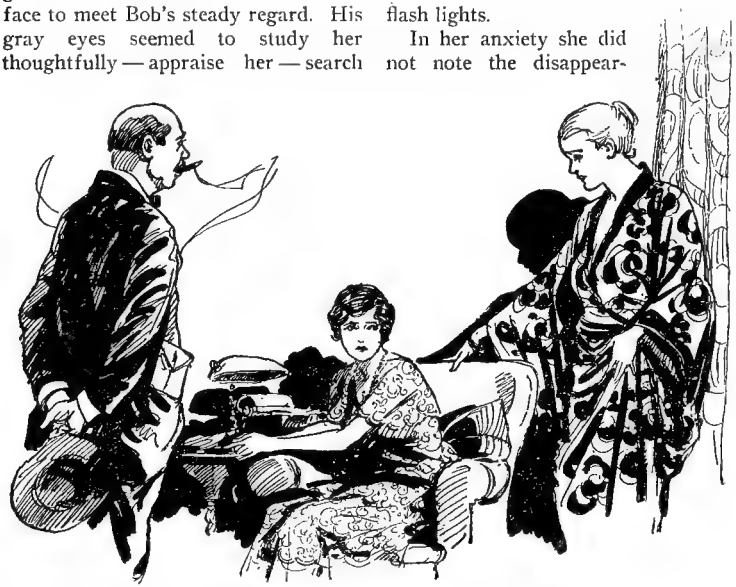
"You have lost something, miss?" he asked solicitously.

Sue excitedly told him of the nature of her loss. He called the head waiter. The head waiter called the red-faced house detective. It was all done smoothly, quietly and efficiently, but comment ran from table to table to the effect that a diamond had been lost, and in a few minutes the place buzzed with interest and speculation. The orchestra was stopped and waiters searched the floor with flash lights.

In her anxiety she did not note the disappearance of Bob Lee. She was aware that he was not at her side, to be sure, but everything was confusion. Every one was searching—here, there, everywhere—in the most absurd places. Voices were high.

It was the house detective who first discovered that the young lady's escort was not among those present. It seemed that Bob had left a ten-dollar bill on the table to take care of the check and vanished.

"Clever touch, that," said the red-faced house detective, indicating the



"This girl owes me for that ring!" she cried shrilly. "It was worth a thousand dollars, and she'll have to pay!"

money. "But I don't fall for nothing so simple. What do you know about this feller, lady?"

Sue told what she knew, with reservations. She repeated her story a little later to two hard-boiled headquarters detectives down in the hotel manager's office. She told about her rescue and the circumstances leading up to her visit to the roof garden, but she omitted to tell about Bob's interest in the diamond.

She insisted that she had lost it and vehemently combatted any suggestions that Bob Lee had stolen it; there were plenty of such suggestions. In fact, there seemed to be no doubt in any one's mind but her own as to the identity of the thief.

"You say this guy, what called himself Robert E. Lee, picks you up down by the Fox," said Sergeant Fogarty with vulgar directness. "Then when you miss the rock he runs out on you. And still you don't think he's a thief?" He turned to Detective Casey. "Ain't that just like a woman?" He shook his grizzled head commiseratingly. "Lady! lady! What kind of proof do you want?"

"But I'm sure he didn't take it," insisted Sue tearfully. "He couldn't be that sort of man."

"That's just the sort of fellow it takes to make a good con man," commented Casey with the assurance of long experience. "One of them smooth guys."

"But if he was a thief he wouldn't have left the money," pointed out Sue triumphantly.

"Just a slick trick to throw us off the track, lady," said the red-faced house detective. "Just a slick trick."

"You say it wasn't your rock?" asked Sergeant Fogarty. "You were just looking after it for a lady friend?"

Sue nodded her head miserably. What would Crissy think? What would she say? And Bob—why had he deserted her so suddenly? But she couldn't believe him guilty. She remembered his eyes as they had been when she first looked into them—clear and kind. And again as they had been before he saw the diamond on her finger—warm and ardent across the little rose-colored lamp on their table—tender and adoring as they had looked into hers during that first moonlit waltz.

But he had acted in a strange way from the moment he had seen the solitaire, and she had a sick feeling as she recalled his manner upon learning that it was gone. Then she recoiled from the horrible goal to which her thoughts were leading her. It simply could not be! She would stake her life on his honor. Those steady eyes belong to a thief?

"I guess you better take the lady home, Casey," said Sergeant Fogarty, "and I'll try and locate this feller what calls himself Lee." He turned to Sue, slightly embarrassed. "Casey'll have to see the owner of the ring, miss, and check up on your story, just as a matter of form."

After Sue had given her name and address to the hotel manager, she and Casey left for her home. As they traversed the almost deserted streets the moon slipped down beneath the skyline of the buildings, leaving the city a patchwork of garish yellow lights and ugly shadows. Sue's heart ached as she and the detective climbed the rickety stairs of the rooming house to face Crissy. Gone was her cherished dream of a South Seas voyage. Gone was Hobart, who mattered little save for the depressing disillusion caused by the manner of his going. And gone

was tall, lean Bob Lee with his clear gray eyes and shining hair.

CRISSY was waiting for them in Sue's room, fuming and fretting with impatience. She wore a soiled, rose-colored wrapper and run-over pink mules. The skin beneath her big pale eyes was puffy, and her blondined hair fell across her forehead in untidy wisps. Apparently she had been napping on the couch in the corner behind the typewriter.

Sue's face was pale and she twisted her small handkerchief between her fingers in evident distress. She could see that Crissy was in a bad humor and feared the ugly scene that was about to be enacted. But she told her story simply and courageously.

"—and when we got back to the table I noticed that it was gone," she finished wearily.

"Yeah!" Crissy sneered her disbelief and looked knowingly at Casey, standing just inside the door, derby in hand. "Yeah! So the stone just slipped out of its setting, for no good reason at all. Now wasn't that inconvenient? Well, listen to me, big girl!" Her voice rose shrilly. "That stone was worth five hundred berries if it was worth a cent! You can either dig up the stone or the money! I don't care which! I quit falling for cock-and-bull stories long ago!"

"But, lady!" interrupted Casey. "This here girl says you left the diamond with her of your own free will—asked her to keep it for you. Is that correct?"

Crissy's face went blank with the force of some sudden idea. Her eyes narrowed cunningly. After all, it was her word against Sue's, and who would believe this dark-haired girl's improbable tale? Who else was to deny that the ring had been borrowed—even stolen? What an opportunity for blackmail! It was evident that the detective was already skeptical. Again she looked at him knowingly, and this time her glance was accompanied by a sugary smile.

"Leave us alone for a few minutes, officer. Maybe we can reach an understanding. I don't want to make any trouble for this girl if I can help it."

"There is no need for privacy," said Sue stiffly. It was quite obvious that Crissy would be as easily satisfied with the money as with the diamond itself. Sue was relieved to find that its value was but little beyond her means to pay. True, it would mean the loss of her longed-for trip, but that couldn't be helped. She would give Crissy all she had and make up the difference.

"I have saved some money," she said, "about four hundred and fifty dollars." She walked over to her old-fashioned bureau and took her savings account book from the upper left drawer. It had been balanced a couple of days earlier and told its own tale of painfully hoarded savings. She handed the book to Crissy.

"I will draw you a check for the amount in the bank now and give you five dollars every Saturday for the next ten weeks."

Crissy started to speak and then hesitated, her face a study of greed and shrewdness. Then, under Sue's steady regard, she shifted her pale eyes to various objects about the room.

"Well, you see, honey," she temporized. "When I said the diamond was worth five hundred dollars, it was just a rough guess. I was kind of excited. I remember now that the boy friend said it stood him a thousand."

"But lady—" protested the astonished Casey.

Crissy held up her hand. "Just a minute, officer." She smiled hypocritically. "I'm not asking for the full amount. If Miss Shirley will give me a check for four hundred and fifty and agree to pay me three hundred more I will forget the balance."

Sue went a shade whiter, but she took the blow like a soldier. It hadn't occurred to her honest, straightforward mind to question the other's good faith.

"I agree," she said simply. She wrote out the check and handed it to Crissy. Then she twisted the empty-pronged ring from her finger and extended it also.

Crissy waved it back contemptuously.

"Keep it, honey," she said, folding the check carefully. "You're paying for it." And Sue, scarcely aware of what she was doing, slipped the gold circlet back on to her finger.

Casey watched these proceedings with somewhat dubious eyes.

"You ain't told me yet," he reminded Crissy, "whether this young lady's story about your leaving the stone with her is straight."

Crissy hesitated, then shrugged her plump shoulders.

"Why, yes," she said. "I'm willing to okay her story." But she managed to convey an unmistakable impression that she was letting the matter appear in that light solely through generosity.

However, this angle apparently did not concern Casey greatly. All parties to the affair seemed satisfied, and his instructions had been carried out.

After the door had closed behind the pair Sue stood in the center of the room trying to fight back the tears. Her dreams were shattered, her zest for life gone. The future seemed to stretch hopelessly before her in an endless vista of drab, uninteresting days. Love had come only to loot her heart and leave it dreary and desolate. She flung herself upon the couch in a wild abandon of grief.

"Bob!" she sobbed. "Bob! Why did you run away?"

SUE was too heartsick to bother with undressing. Her shoulders heaved spasmodically, and great rasping sobs tore at her throat.

How long she had lain there on the couch she did not know. It seemed to her that she had been hovering on the borderland of consciousness for ages—vacillating between the awful nightmares of sleep and the yet more awful anguish of reality.

Suddenly she came to her feet, half awake, dimly aware of some terrible depression. Ah, yes! She remembered! And she shuddered in the raw wind of early morning that poured through her open window from the outside darkness.

Then, for the first time, she became aware of the cause of her awakening—the tramp of heavy feet on the stairway. The footsteps came along the hall and a fist pounded on her door.

"Come in!" she called in a flat, emotionless voice. Nothing could surprise her, nor add to the burden of woe that was already hers.

The door swung inward and there in the dim hall stood Sergeant Fogarty and by his side a tall, lean young man with clear gray eyes and close-curled hair that shone like bronze in the light from the room.

"Bob!" cried Sue incredulously. "Bob!" And her husky contralto broke and thrilled with a note of joy.

He stood motionless, his face set in hard, stubborn lines. He had a drawn, haggard look and there were dark

circles beneath his eyes. For a moment he stared at Sue's disheveled figure—the crumpled dress of midnight blue, tangled black curls, grief-stained face, and those tear-ravaged aquamarine eyes, now glowing into his own with eager hope.

His expression softened and he took a quick step toward her, to be brought up short by the heavy hand of Fogarty on his shoulder.

"Just a minute, friend!" said that worthy. And for the first time it occurred to Sue that, after all, Bob hadn't come to her of his own free will. The detective looked at her questioningly. "Is this the man that was with you when you missed the rock?" he asked.

"He was with me when I *lost* it," answered Sue. "But I have paid the owner. That is, I have made arrangements to pay her."

Bob's start of surprise reminded her of her deception regarding the ownership of the ring, but, she thought, he surely must have learned the truth by this time. She flushed as she met his bewildered eyes.

"Didn't Sergeant Fogarty tell you that the ring wasn't mine?"

"I didn't tell this bird nothing!" interposed Fogarty hurriedly. "I don't answer questions. I ask them." He paused and then added irritably, "But I ain't got nothing out of this egg yet. Maybe he'll talk for you."

It must have been close to dawn, and Sue could hardly have imagined a less fitting time and place to unburden her heart—here in the presence of this tough-minded detective. But she felt that, in some way, her original deceit about the ring was at the bottom of a greater misunderstanding. She looked straight into Bob's eyes.

"I am not engaged," she began. "I have never been engaged. A girl asked me to keep her ring for her last evening. I had forgotten I had it on until you saw it. I don't know why I let you think it was mine."

Bob averted his eyes before her gaze. She wondered why he should color so painfully, but he remained silent.

THEN she was startled to hear Crissy's affected, oversweet voice from the open door.

"Why, Bob Lee! What are you doing here at this time of the morning?"

It was a far different Crissy from the one that had left the room earlier in the night. Her blond hair was now smooth and tidy; she wore a neat green negligee with mules to match, and evidently she had found time to give attention to her makeup. Excepting for an almost imperceptible pouchiness under her eyes, her face was more doll-like than ever. Noting these details, Sue decided that Crissy had heard the men when they came in, but she wondered what on earth Crissy had to do with Bob Lee.

He was looking at the newcomer stonily.

"So it's you!" he said, and his voice had a bitter, cutting quality for which Sue was at a loss to account.

Crissy tripped kittenishly across the room and threw a white arm about his neck.

"Oh, Bob!" she gushed. "I've just had the most terrible experience. I'm simply broken-hearted. Your ring is gone!"

"Yes!" he said coldly. "So I understand." And Sue's heart lifted as he reached up and pulled the clinging white arm from his neck. Fogarty stood in the background, taking in the situation with professional interest.

Crissy stepped back with all the appearance of hurt surprise.

"What's the matter, dear?" she exclaimed. "Why, Bob! You act as though you actually believed this girl's silly story!"

"So you were listening," he observed. "Well, suppose you listen some more." His voice was low and even, but his gray eyes smoldered. "In the first place, you lied to me last night when you said you were sick! I happened to see you in front of the Fox Theater with another man. You left the ring with this young lady because you wished to trick him, just as you tricked me last night and are trying to trick me now! Also, you seem to have taken money for something that didn't belong to you and never will!"

This was too much for even Crissy's self-control. Fists clenched and mouth twisting into an ugly line, she glared at him.

"You and your ring!" she shrilled. "I'm glad to be rid of both! I'm done with you! Do you hear! The engagement is off!"

Bob smiled dryly.

"And what do you propose to do with the money you have taken from this girl," he inquired, "now that the engagement is, as you say, 'off'?"

"Keep it, of course! Prove it's not mine if you can! Try and get it!"

Here Sergeant Fogarty stepped forward to the fray. The ancient police theory that when crooks disagree crime will out seemed to be bearing fruit.

"You'll do nothing of the sort!" he thundered. "Neither of you's going to get a cent out of this little girl." Sue gave an inarticulate cry of protest, but he silenced her with a peremptory gesture, and continued to address his remarks to Crissy. "It looks like your boy friend took the diamond, and I guess it belongs to him. That's something you two can fight out between you. But your deal with this girl is something else again. Casey told me all about it, and it stinks of blackmail." He turned to Bob, standing pale and rigid under this attack. "What was the diamond worth, young feller?"

"Possibly four or five hundred dollars," answered Bob with obvious self-restraint. "It's value was largely sentimental—an oddly cut stone that had been in my family for generations."

Fogarty looked from him to Crissy scathingly.

"And you tried to hold this girl up for a thousand! Trot in and get that check," he ordered, "or I'll run the pair of you in!"

"Keep your shirt on!" said Crissy sullenly. "I'll get it!" And she swept from the room with the injured air of a tragedy queen.

SUE'S eyes were wide with astonishment. Crissy and Bob engaged! Crissy and Hobart, Bob and herself, all involved in the same web of lies and misunderstanding. Her world had turned topsy-turvy, but from the twisted jumble certain things stood out startlingly clear. She now understood the cool stare Bob had given her when she told him the diamond was lost—his diamond, worn by a woman he had "picked up" in the street.

Of course he had taken the diamond! Why not? She had refused to tell him her name, even tried to make him think the ring was her own. He must have worked the solitaire from its setting while they were dancing. If he had only questioned me first, she thought, bitterly, even denounced me.

But he took it for granted that I was a thief — snatched his diamond and slipped off without a word. I suppose he intended to be as kind as possible.

Crissy stalked in, handed the check to Sue and stalked out again, holding her negligee close about her buxom figure with an air of crushing dignity, and speaking to no one.

Fogarty grinned and wrinkled his nose significantly.

"That is that," he commented and turned to Bob with a weary yawn. "Well, let's get going. It's broad daylight and the little lady needs sleep."

Bob looked at Sue intently, as though seeking to convey some plea for understanding.

"There is something I'd like to say to you if I may? I'll try to make it short."

She returned his gaze uncertainly. What could he possibly have to say to her, now? But whatever it was, she had an irresistible longing to hear it. She nodded her tousled head.

"Of course," she answered in a tone that she tried to make distant and impersonal.

Then, with misleading guile, she offered her hand to Fogarty and smiled gratefully.

"Good-by!" she said sweetly. "I certainly appreciate all you've done for me."

And that stout fellow, Fogarty, unconscious that he was being skillfully dismissed, grasped her slim hand in his huge paw and shook it heartily.

"Good-by, miss, and good luck. If you should ever need me"—and here he glanced at Bob, open distrust in his Celtic eyes—"just give headquarters a ring and ask for Fogarty."

Bob listened to the heavy, retreating tread with a whimsical grin.

"The sergeant seems to doubt my good intentions," he remarked. Then he turned to Sue soberly.

"You haven't told me your name yet," he reminded her. "I didn't like to ask in front of the others.

"It is Sue," she informed him with a faint smile. "Suzanne Shirley." She moved over to the couch and sat down. "Won't you have a chair?"

The white light of dawn filled the drab little room, paling the overhead electrics to a feeble glow, and streamed out through the open door into the dingy hall. Bob, looming extraordinarily tall in the small place, looked about uncertainly and Sue watched him from beneath her long lashes. There were two chairs over by the typewriter table and a three-legged stool in front of her dresser. He hesitated a moment and then walked over and sat down beside her on the couch.

"You left so unexpectedly last night," she explained demurely, "I had no time to tell you my name."

"It was a terrible thing for me to do," he said contritely. "Can you ever forgive me?"

"There is nothing to forgive. You acted as any one might have, under the circumstances." But there was a dull ache in her heart. "Just as any one else might have acted."

"I know!" he groaned. "I know! But, please forgive me, Sue. I was only trying to protect you. I knew I'd be questioned if I stayed. I didn't dare tell the truth and couldn't think of a lie that would sound like the truth."

"You would have lied for me?" she asked slowly. "Even if you thought I'd taken the diamond?"

"Lied for you?" he cried. "Yes! I would have stolen for you! Killed for you if necessary! I love you." His voice deepened and became vibrant

with emotion. "Will you marry me, Sue?"

She shrunk back from the light that blazed in his gray eyes, so close to hers—looked away so that he might not read her sudden ecstasy, fought down the tumult that rose in her breast. For in the background of her mind there lurked an ugly vision—a vision of a hand working in the dark, worrying a diamond from its frail setting.

Could love ever quench the memory of that act of supreme distrust? Would it not come between them constantly—rise up to haunt her a dozen years hence?

She was aware of his pleading look; felt the disturbing warmth of his nearness. She longed to say yes!"—wanted to take him to her hungry heart. But she was afraid—afraid.

THE first ray of the morning sun struck through the chintz curtains and bathed the two of them in its brilliant golden light. Suddenly Sue became aware of a quick movement at her side and looked to find Bob pointing excitedly down at her gown.

"What is it?" she asked, and her eyes followed his pointing finger.

"The lost has been found!" he exulted.

And there, caught in a lace loop at the side of her frock, nestled the sparkling solitaire.

Sue stared blankly.

"Why!" she gasped, reaching down to free the stone from its entangling mesh. "It must have been there all the time. I thought—I thought—"

"—that I had taken it?" he prompted gently.

She colored painfully.

"Yes. But not until I learned that it belonged to you. Then I thought I understood why you had left me so suddenly. Did you think I was a thief, Bob?"

"Certainly not! But I was afraid the police would. When that detective appeared on the scene I suddenly realized that if we were questioned together it might be extremely embarrassing for you. I was willing to play your game, whatever it was, but you hadn't taken me into your confidence. I didn't even know your name."

"So you ran off," said Sue softly. "Made it appear that you had stolen the diamond just to save me from humiliation. But, Bob, after you knew the truth, why in the world did you let Crissy and Sergeant Fogarty think you'd taken it? You even convinced me."

He smiled wryly.

"Do you think," he countered. "that Crissy would ever have returned your check so long as she believed the diamond lost? It was necessary to let her believe I'd taken it."

At last Sue understood, and the radiance imprisoned in the blue heart of the solitaire swam before her blurred eyes—became a wavering, many-rayed sun of brilliance. Tears bathed her quivering features and sparkled downward.

"Sue!" cried Bob in consternation. "Darling! You're crying!" And he reached out his competent arms and gathered the sobbing Sue to his breast. How could he know that a girl's happiness may become so exquisite that it must find its relief in tears?

He cradled the tumbled black head close to his own, and patted her shoulder soothingly. When her sobs had diminished to an occasional tremulous sigh he gripped her arms and held her

from him—oh, not so very far from him, not over two inches.

"Sue, darling, I asked you a question a few minutes ago," he reminded her.

"Ask it again—please ask it again, dear!"

"Will you marry me?"

Her slim hands stole upward and buried themselves in those tempting bronze curls. Her lips parted breathlessly; her blue eyes wavered, closed. Then the two inches that had separated her from Bob became exactly nothing at all.

After a few moments of sweet insanity she gently disengaged herself and dropped the glittering crystal into his palm.

"Here's your diamond, dear."

"No!" he corrected. "Yours." He reached over and took her left hand. "Let's see what kind of a jeweler I am."

The empty ring was still on her finger, and Bob, with the aid of a pocket knife, went skillfully about the job of resetting the odd-shaped solitaire.

He was bending the prongs of the mounting firmly in place when he looked up as though struck by a sudden idea.

"Sue, darling!"

"What is it, dear?"

"Will you let me choose the place for our honeymoon?"

She smiled into his anxious eyes, wondering what could have prompted the request, and nodded her head in assent.

"Let's take a South Seas cruise," he said eagerly. "You know—the Marquesas—Tahiti—Pago Pago." He reached into an inside pocket of his coat and drew forth a brilliantly colored folder. "I've always wanted to make the trip," he said enthusiastically. "Down under the Southern Cross—dancing natives — strumming guitars—"

Sue's eyes glowed back into his like twin stars.

"Blue seas and waving palms," she added softly, for she knew every word of that folder by heart. "Golden days and silver nights. Down where the wind is the very breath of romance itself. Oh, Bob! Bob, dear—" And her voice trailed off into a silence that any lover will understand as his lips closed down upon hers.

THE RECOMPENSE

SOMEBODY'S arms enfolded me; somebody held me—tight!
Somebody gazed into my eyes, kindling Cupid's light.
Somebody kissed me in a way that dreams of Life fulfill.
Somebody loved—and rode away! (But my Dream is with me still.)

—*Wanda May*

Whenever Stan spoke to Karen, she was shivery with cold and prickly with heat

One Chance for Love

By VIRGINIA SPENCER

KAREN GRILL tucked a pair of perfect legs underneath her typewriter desk in the office of the most thriving real estate business on Lower Sixth. Before turning her attention to her work, she cast a sympathetic glance through the open door at other girls hurrying to their respective jobs.

Just a trifle wearily Karen inserted paper in her machine and encircled her sleek black head with a pair of earphones. Another day had begun, a day of dictaphone records and shorthand hieroglyphics. She had thought a real estate firm would be a better place to work than a lawyer's office because so many men would be dropping in. But all the good looking ones brought their wives.

No. Not *all* the good looking ones. Stanley Tillman had no wife, and apparently did not want one. Or if he did, his taste did not run to such insignificant raw material as stenos. Karen had employed every art in the catalog of feminine guile, but Stanley Tillman continued to say "my stenographer" with no more endearment than he said "my desk" and certainly less enthusiasm than he said "my flivver."

"I have an idea," Karen thought to herself now. "Since Tillie won't nibble my bait, I'll try a new line. I haven't

got to first base with those soulful sighs and get-me glances I have been shying in his direction, so I'll change my tactics. I'll abandon the ambush idea and attack him in the open, play up to him, rush him. On the one hand, I have a sporting chance of winning. But on the other hand—I—well, at least, I have nothing to lose. Still, it'll take a lot of brass to play up to Tillie. I wonder if I dare. He is so—oh! so everything. And I am so—nothing."

She swallowed very hard trying to get rid of something which insisted on rising in her throat whenever she thought of Stanley Tillman.

"Karen Grill," she admonished, "you can't win unless you think you can. Buckle on your armor and go to it."

SHE snatched the earphones from her head and whirled around in her swivel chair, bringing her legs in full view where they belonged.

"Lily Meadows," she addressed her fellow sufferer. "Believe it or not, I have an idea. I—"

"Don't call me Lily," commanded that young lady crossly. And when Lil was cross, her face became as red as her hair and the sprinkling of golden freckles stood out on her tiptilted nose like brass buttons on a policeman.

"Oh, I forgot, honest, Lil. But I do think Lily's a pretty name."

"Yeah, for a lily. But who ever heard of a freckled lily? Unless it was a tiger lily."

"Aw, what's in a name? Take moonshine for instance. Or look at me. Skinny little runt with a complexion like the ten of clubs and a name like a big Swede. But as I was saying when so rudely interrupted, I have an idea."

"*No!*"

"Yep. Sure thing. Fact is, I've joined the Royal Northwest Mounted, and I'm out to get my man. Not just any old sugar daddy to play around with, but a real honest-to-gosh he-male to tie on to. Get me?"

"I get *you*, all right. But will *you* get *him?* Well, here's to you! If you have any luck, you can start a night school for stenos and I'll get there early and grab a front seat." With that, Lil gave her undivided attention to the abstract she was typing.

"Coffee," suggested Napoleon from his cage by the open door leading on to the street.

"Lil, did you ever hear of anything dummer than a parrot in a business office?"

"No. Don't believe I ever did. George Powell sure gets the cut glass ice pick and the barbed wire garters."

"Coffee," Napoleon repeated, not a mere suggestion this time but an actual demand.

"Aw, pipe down," Karen told him.

"Pipe down. Pipe down," echoed the parrot lustily.

Karen scowled at him as she approached Lil's desk. "Think what I told you about snatching myself a papa is a lotta bologna, don't you? Well, you just watch my powder and smoke."

"Are you taking aim, or will you use a shotgun and just hope you hit something?"

"No. A shotgun doesn't work. I've taken aim this time, and I mean to get my man." She admitted to herself that since bravado was her only armor, she would need a heavy coat.

"So you've taken aim, huh?" Lil looked up interested. "Who's your target?"

Again Karen swallowed that something which persisted in rising in her throat when she thought of Tillman.

"Who's my target? Why, Tillie, of course. Who else would it be?"

Lil stood up with a jerk. Her face would have done justice to a poker game.

"Stanley Tillman? Now, Karen, *don't* be foolish. George Powell's the papa that's got the wad."

"Yeah. And the suspicious chin. But Stanley Tillman!" Karen heaved a deep sigh. "Womankind! When he turns those glimmers on me—"

"Listen, little one, his baby stare won't pay the butcher. Now, take a tip from your Aunt Lily—"

"Don't call me Lily," screeched Napoleon, flapping up and down on his perch. Both girls tried to squelch him with dirty looks and cutting remarks, but Napoleon continued to screech and flap until he had run down.

Meanwhile the girls eyed each other unflinchingly, accusingly.

"Lil, why don't you lay your cards on the table? I have."

Lil hesitated.

"All right, Karen. Here goes. I *do* want Stanley Tillman—and I mean to get him."

Their eyes met and held, then of one accord they turned on their heels, clicked away and seated themselves at their respective typewriters.

War was declared.

"HELLO, girruls," greeted George Powell as he appeared at the open door.

"Good morning."

"Good morning, Mr. Powell."

"Coffee? Coffee?" asked Napoleon.

"Yes, coffee it is, General. And toast. Did you ever know me to fail you?" He gave the parrot his breakfast.

"Is that abstract finished?" he asked Lil as he came forward.

"Oh, no, Mr. Powell, not quite. I'll —I'll have it finished in just a—"

"No hurry, child. No hurry at all. Just bring it in when you get it finished, will you?"

"Yes, Mr. Powell."

"How are you this morning, young lady?" he asked Karen in passing.

"Swell, thanks. How's yourself?"

"Oh, I can't complain. Don't you girls work too hard." He winked at Karen.

"Don't worry. We won't," Karen told him. And mentally she added, "He's a good old scout. Wonder why some mamma doesn't snap him up now that he's back in circulation."

At precisely eight thirty Stanley Tillman's brand new Ford came to a halt at precisely the same spot where it had come to a halt yesterday and the day before and every day previously since it had belonged to Stanley Tillman.

Karen grabbed her mirror and smoothed her sleek hair while Lil fluffed her red-gold wind blown.

"Good morning, Miss Meadows. Good morning, Miss Grill."

Stanley Tillman was a bronze Apollo released by magic from some plaque or fountain and clad in immaculate business garb. Bronze hair, bronze face, bronze hands.

"And bronze heart," Karen added as she looked at him this morning.

"Miss Grill." His voice was bronze too. Hard and cold and clear, but with a glint of gold.

"Miss Grill, when this gentleman arrives, will you show him in at once?" He laid a business card on Karen's desk.

"Yes, Mr. Tillman," is what she said, but what she thought was, "You give me the card because it would be expecting entirely too much of a mere

steno to remember a name. Well, have it your way, Good Looking. But you'll be eating out of my hand before I get through with you."

As he walked to the door and disappeared into his own office, Karen stole a glance in Lil's direction to see if her gaze had followed the retreating figure just as Lil risked an eye in Karen's direction for the same purpose. Then the two typewriters clicked noisily, maliciously, as though each would drown out the other.

Telephones jangled, buzzers buzzed, and callers called continually as the long day dragged on. Above the noises of business routine Napoleon on his perch voiced his loyalty to his home town by screeching, "Buy a home in New York," proclaimed vigorously that "these lots would be cheap at twice the price," implored the world at large not to call him Lily.

Intermittently, the air between Karen and Lil dripped icicles.

THE next morning as Karen opened her desk, applied a few dabs of that schoolgirl complexion and performed other tasks preparatory to beginning a day's work, she stole glances at Lil similarly occupied. Not a word was spoken. Even Napoleon sulked on his perch.

"Gosh," thought Karen, "it's bad enough to be working for a real estate firm during a boom, but as though that wasn't bad enough, I had to go and have a fight with my buddy—over a man who considers both of us a part of the office furniture."

"Oh, I say, Lily—"

"Don't call me Lily!"

Karen grinned. "Whoopee! I did make her talk."

"Whoopee! I did make her talk," echoed Napoleon, coming to life.

Lil met Karen halfway between the two desks and they started talking at once.

"Listen," they said simultaneously. "Go on, what did you start to say? No, you go on. Spill it."

"Well, Karen, I have an idea. It's a walkout we both can't have Tillie. So let's agree to let the better one have him."

"I'll just tell you frankly, Lil. I think he likes *me*."

"But, Karen, I *know* he likes me."

There was a perceptible drop in temperature.

"Lil, I have an idea." Karen, a native of Kentucky, had bet on horses all her life, and she had always won when she played a hunch. She had a hunch now. "I have an idea. Let's draw straws. The one that gets the long straw gets the inside track. She can go ahead and play up to Tillie. The one that gets the short straw lays off Tillie. Are you game?" Her blood danced as it had not danced since she had last seen a horse race.

Lil hesitated. "You bet your hat I'm game." But the fear in her eyes belied her words.

"I know where the janitor keeps the broom," and Karen was off to the closet under the stairs. She returned a moment later with a long, dirty straw.

"Karen, *I* have an idea. Suppose the one that gets the short straw plays up to Pops! Not that either of us want him for all his fat wallet, but just for a lark. The one that gets the short straw will want some diversion. We'll each get our man."

"Swell idea, Lil. The long straw stands for Tillie, the short one for Pops."

Napoleon cocked his head to one side and said nothing. But he made a fan

of his tail and an Elizabethan ruff of his neck feathers while the pupils of his eyes contracted into nothingness, all of which indicated that he was being highly entertained.

"Lil, I'm on the level. I'll play square."

"You can count on me, too, Karen."

They shook hands.

"Shush, shush, here comes Pops." Karen dashed over to her desk and Lil to hers.

"Hello, girruls," Napoleon greeted George Powell. "Hello, Pops. Coffee?"

"Good morning, girls. Greetings, General."

"Draw straws. Draw straws," Napoleon squawked as he plopped his toast into his coffee.

GEORGE POWELL picked up the straw from Lil's desk, but Lil was suddenly very busy opening and closing a drawer. He glanced at Karen before she could look away and they both laughed.

"Come on, girls. 'Fess up. You were about to draw straws for something. Isn't it so?" He looked at Karen, who nodded. "All right, then. It's a good thing I came in."

"Yes, you can hold the straws, sure," Karen told him.

George Powell turned his back on the two girls with due apologies for his rudeness while he broke the straws.

"Am I to be let in on the secret?"

"Oh, yes," Karen replied. "If you insist, we'll tell you *something.*"

"You'll tell me *something,* but it won't be the truth?"

"I'll tell the world it won't be the truth."

"All right, girls. Here you are." He held his fist toward them, a fist with two bits of straw showing between his thumb and index finger. He looked from one to the other, his blue eyes dancing. "Who's first?"

"Karen," Lil suggested, "you go first."

Karen stepped forward eagerly. Without hesitation she chose the straw on the outside. That was her hunch, and her hunches never failed her. Lil nervously snatched the remaining one.

Karen held her straw up to measure it with Lil's, but measurement was not necessary. The straw Lil held was more than twice as long as her own. A tightness came to her throat. She could not speak.

"Well, it seems you get the long one," George Powell addressed Lil. "And you, my dear, get the short fat one. Is everybody happy?"

"Sure. You bet." Karen laughed shakily.

Nobody had ever accused her of being a bad sport. The long straw was meant for her, she *knew* it was meant for her, but she had lost the race. The only race that had ever mattered. She had lost Stanley Tillman.

But there had never been a yellow streak in her family. The Grills played square. So would she, Karen, play square, no matter what it cost her in heartache.

"Sure, you bet, everybody's happy," she informed George Powell, and she gave Lil's hand a squeeze as she rushed past her to her own desk.

"BUZZ-BUZZ," in a high key. That was Stanley Tillman buzzing for Karen.

"Yes, Tillie, m'love," Karen told the buzzer.

"Not *your* love, *my* love," Lil reminded her.

"That's right." She came over to Lil's desk. "I've surrendered all claim

to Tillie. I'm out of the race, and that's on the level."

"Karen. You don't really love him, do you?"

Karen turned away. "Oh, no, I don't lo—love him." And she was gone.

It was a very subdued Karen that entered Stanley Tillman's office and sat down opposite him at his desk. He was apparently absorbed in a telegram and did not look up, and Karen was glad to sit quietly near him. That was just the way he would look if—if—if he were reading a newspaper as they sat together in the evening. His bronze head was so near her own that she could reach out and touch the shining hair.

Without warning he looked directly into her eyes. She felt the blood rush to her face as she quickly looked away.

"This will be a day letter to—"

Karen caught up her pencil, snapped open her notebook and wrote frantically what he dictated. He spoke with a crisp New England accent which she found delightful. It was so different. In fact, everything about him was different from the men she had known at home or here in New York. He was—

"Oh, I beg your pardon. Will you give me those figures again?" Then she remembered that he had requested her not to interrupt his dictation. She jumped. "Snap!" The point of her pencil popped across the room.

"Oh, I'm *so* sorry. And I—I—forgot to bring two pencils."

He frowned slightly. He was *so* good looking when he frowned. Without comment he handed her the gold

"Karen! What does that bird mean?"

pencil from the pocket of his white shirt. The pencil was quite warm. Her cold fingers closed about it tenderly, eager for this warmth that had come from his heart.

By the time he had finished dictating Karen was taut with trying to hear what he said rather than how he said it. She gave him back his pencil, swallowed her tongue when she tried to say "Thank you," and dashed out the door at breakneck speed. Without warning she crashed into somebody, the floor made a sudden lurch in her direction, and a pair of arms were flung about her.

"I hadn't heard the fire alarm," George Powell laughed, his lips very close to her cheek.

"I'm—I'm awfully sorry—" she began.

"Oh, that's all right," he said as he picked up her things. "It's all right with me. It—er—it isn't everyday I get a chance to grab an armful of pretty girl."

Karen looked at him speculatively. If she was going to play up to Pops, now was the time to begin. It might help her to forget.

"And it isn't every day I get a chance to be grabbed by a good looking man."

He rewarded her with a blush, not the kind you buy at fifty cents a jar, but a real one.

"If I were fifteen years younger, I—I—" He swallowed.

"Listen, big boy. I'm no cradle snatcher. I like a man old enough to know his way around."

"And how old is that?"

She gave him an appraising glance and made a quick estimate.

"Oh, about forty."

He beamed and settled his tie so she knew she had made a lucky guess.

"Now run along, child, or you'll be turning an old man's head."

"I wish I could think there was a chance," she flung over her shoulder.

NEITHER Karen nor Lil knew how the miracle was wrought, but before a week had passed they were dated up with Pops and Tillie.

"Karen, I can't believe it yet that I am actually stepping out with Tillie to-night." Lil spoke out of the corner of her screwed-up mouth because applying black mascara to straw colored eyelashes is a major operation.

"Well, it's so." Karen paused in the act of kiss proofing her lips.

"But, Karen, ever since I started playing up to Tillie, he's been treating me more and more like a dose of poison ivy."

"Maybe he wants to get you out to-night on a lonely dark road and choke you to death!"

"Lonely dark road with Tillie. Death, where is thy sting?"

Napoleon cocked his head to one side, made a fan of his tail and an Elizabethan ruff of his neck feathers while the pupils of his eyes contracted to nothingness.

"Tell me, Karen, just what Pops said when he dated you up."

"Well, ever since I decided to run Pops down, I've been scattering party propaganda like smallpox." Karen whirled around, bringing her perfect legs in full view where they belonged. "Then last Monday afternoon Pops toddled up to me real playful-like, purring like a lion that's just eaten his keeper. 'Oh, I say, Karen.' he yodled."

"Oh! So he called you by your front name, huh?"

"Oh, yeah. But of course he used

it kind of awkward-like as you would a new set of false teeth. 'Karen,' he crooned, 'would you and your girl friend go out on a party?'

"'Listen, big boy,' I said. 'We've never yet gone out on any party we were at. At the New Year's brawl we were the only females who *didn't* go out, but Lil and I were still whoopin' her up at six A. M.'"

But Karen carefully omitted what Pops had confided about Tillie. That Stanley Tillman had absolutely no interest in the proposed party, and he, George Powell, had never worked half so hard on a real estate prospect as he had worked on Stan before he was finally sold on this party.

No, Karen did not tell Lil that.

GEORGE POWELL chose an expensive night club for his party because he rightly guessed that neither of the girls had ever been to a night club.

Whenever Stanley Tillman addressed a remark to Karen, she was shivery with cold and prickly with heat. To hide her embarrassment she devoted most of her attention to her host. He told her she looked like Cleopatra in her yellow taffeta dress with the long billowy skirt that went swish every time she moved. He told Lil her green tulle was poultry netting and she was a chicken.

Every time Karen found herself dancing with Stanley, she was speechless with ecstasy.

"Oh, why can't I say something?" she grieved. "He'll think I'm the prize dumb-bell. Lil chatters away to him and snuggles up and they have a swell time. Gee, but it's tough to be in love all by yourself."

They were dancing together when the orchestra played "I Love You Truly," and the lights were turned low. Then he held her quite close. She laid her cheek against the lapel of his coat and pretended that he was holding her close because he loved her and not merely because the floor was so crowded.

They drove home the long way, Karen sitting on the front seat of the Packard with Pops, with Lil and Tillie on the back seat. Twice Pops reached over to give Karen's hand a squeeze and seemed to get a thrill that comes once in a lifetime. And twice Karen deliberately looked into the mirror on the windshield, but the second time she saw that Lil had her head on Tillie's shoulder so she did not punish herself by looking again. Instead she snuggled up to Pops and talked it off by the yard as though somebody had dropped a nickel in the slot.

Lil stayed all night with Karen, that is, what there was left of the night, and they talked until morning. Lil did most of the talking while Karen lay there and listened, drinking in every word about Stanley Tillman.

"Looks like we'll each get our man all right, hey, Karen?"

"Looks that way," Karen laughed. But to herself she added: 'No, I won't get *my* man. But the Grills have always been good sports, played the game square, and never showed yellow."

TWO weeks later Stanley Tillman threw a party. Karen and Lil talked of nothing else from the time they knew about it.

Stan insisted on being sole host and so refused George Powell's high-powered boats in favor of his own flivver in which he drove his guests to the dock where they gayly embarked for Coney Island. This was a Stanley

Tillman Karen had never seen, never imagined existed. When he came down off his high pedestal of reserve, Karen was at first shocked, then delighted to find him so human.

In Luna Park they rode on everything there was to ride on, slid on slides, swung on swings, popped toy balloons and ate hot dogs and pop corn. As a grand finale they went for a swim in the indoor pool. Karen swam to an artificial island and crawled up on the sand to rest.

"Oh, hello, is that you?" asked a familiar voice, and Tillie pulled himself up out of the water and sat down beside her.

"Do you like my party?" he asked, stretching himself out on the sand and smiling up at her.

"Oh, *so* much."

"I followed you because I want to talk with you. You always seem to be running from me."

He waited, but she did not reply.

"Karen, will you go out with me some evening soon? Alone, I mean, without the other two?"

Ecstasy rose in her heart and acquiescence to her lips. But before she could speak, she saw two straws, a long one and a short one, and recalled her own words, "Lil, I'm on the level. I'll play square." Was she, Karen Grill, going to show yellow? Not on your life!

"Oh," she cried, springing up. "There's something in this sand, a crab or something. Ooo!" She dived off into the water.

For several days afterward Stanley Tillman's attitude in the office was unchanged except that he looked up and smiled when she came in to the room. Then one day when she rose to leave he quietly asked, "Are there any crabs in this room, do you suppose?"

"Not unless I'm one."

"Then perhaps you will not run away so fast this time. Will you go to a show with me this evening?"

Again ecstasy rose in her heart and shone in her eyes. But again came that memory of two straws, a long one and a short one.

"I have another engagement tonight." Her gaze shifted about the room. "I'm sorry I can't go with you," she added sincerely.

"I am sorry too. Another time I hope I have better luck."

In the days and weeks that followed, Stanley Tillman tried again and again to make an engagement with Karen, but she put him off with first one excuse and then another. Perhaps Lil would decide she could not get him after all and release Karen from her contract, but until then, there was nothing she could do. In the meantime, she would get a position somewhere else where she would not see Stanley every day.

Through an employment agency she secured another position and gave fifteen days' notice to that effect to Stanley Tillman who acknowledged the resignation formally, coolly.

"DON'T call me Lily," screeched Napoleon.

"Great Cæsar's ghost, General! You're as bad as a radio. Don't you ever sign off?" These remarks came from no less a person than George Powell himself. "I came down to the office to-night to write some personal letters. But how in Sam Hill can I think with that racket going on?"

"Draw straws. Draw straws," squawked Napoleon, jumping up and down on his perch. "Long straw stands for Tillie. I'm on the level. I'll play square."

All thoughts of personal letters suddenly vacated the dome of one George Powell. He stared at Napoleon as though the bird was a two-headed calf or a centipede without any legs. Napoleon, flattered by such unexpected attention, was encouraged to further entertainment.

"That big boy has S.A. Lay off my man, will you? Short straw stands for Pops. Get your man. Get your man. Get your man."

During this last act, Napoleon had been dancing from one end of his cage to the other. Now he wrapped his claws around the perch and whirled round and round, squawking, screaming, screeching.

But George Powell stared without seeing.

"Straws," he said aloud. "Why, I held those straws myself. Tillie. Pops. That can't mean anybody else except Stan and me. Lily. Karen.

"Why, the little devils! And did I bite? I wasn't satisfied with swallowing the bait. I had to take the hook, sinker, line, pole, and all. I thought I was running a real estate business, but it seems it's a matrimonial bureau."

He clenched his fists and stood up.

"Why, I'll fire those two janes to-morrow morning if it's the last thing I ever do."

He started tramping about the room.

"So I'm Pops, am I? The old bird that pays the bills."

With a limp handkerchief he mopped up the beads of perspiration popping out among the failing hosts of blond hairs on the top of his head.

"Well, I'll be—hanged. I bet I know who started this thing. Who hatched it up. Lily Meadows. I wouldn't put it past her. I can't wait until to-morrow to fire her. I'll call her up now and tell her right over the phone that she's fired. Or better still, I'll go over to her place. Yes, sir, if she's home, I'll go right over."

"Get your man," yelled Napoleon. "Get your man. Get your man."

"Shut up," snapped George Powell, as he consulted his memorandum for Lil's address.

Napoleon lapsed into silence and sulked on his perch. After all the high class entertainment he had been putting on, he was told to shut up. His feathers drooped, his head drooped, his spirits drooped.

THE next morning Karen seated herself at her desk somewhat later than her usual hour, for she had not slept.

"I wonder where Lil is," she thought as she opened her makeup box. "Why, what's this? A letter!" The name Karen Grill written on the envelope was in Lil's handwriting.

A sudden panic seized her, and the hand that tore open the envelope trembled. Her brain whirled so she had to make several beginnings before she could read the first sentence with any degree of understanding.

The letter read:

KAREN, MY DEAR:

Try to understand, and forgive me if you can. I couldn't help it, Karen. You'll never know how hard I've tried to be a good sport, to play fair. But I've failed. I'm yellow, you'll say. And I can't blame you.

Before you get this letter, Pops and I will be married and on our honeymoon. Yes, I know I drew the long straw which meant that I was to play up to Tillie. I know too that we gave each other our oath to lay off the other's man. My only excuse for breaking my word is that I love Pops and he loves me.

Once more I beg of you, my dear, to try to understand. And forgive me if you can.

As always,

LIL.

Karen read the letter through twice and pinched herself several times before she was willing to believe that it was all true and not merely a good dream. Waving the single sheet in the air, she danced up and down for sheer joy. Napoleon stretched himself, blinked and began dancing up and down on his perch.

"Oh, oh, oh," Karen sang aloud. "What do you *think*, Napoleon? What *do* you think? Lil's married Pops. Now I can have Tillie. *Lil's* married *Pops*. Now *I* can have *Tillie!*"

"Lil's married Pops. Now I can have Tillie," squawked Napoleon at the top of his lungs. "Lil's married Pops. Now I can have Tillie!"

Stanley Tillman suddenly appeared from nowhere and stood just inside the door. Karen gasped and made frantic gestures to Napoleon, but he continued to screech, "Lil's married Pops. Now I can have Tillie."

Hot tears of shame overflowed Karen's eyes and swept down her cheeks. She turned away quickly, but Stanley caught her wrist.

"Karen. What does this mean?"

She held out the letter, then attempted to snatch it back. But it was too late. He had it in his hands, and he was reading it. Now he would know. Now he would hate her.

He caught her shoulders roughly, swept her into his arms and covered her lips with his own.

Napoleon made a fan of his tail and an Elizabethan ruff of his neck feathers while the pupils of his eyes contracted to nothingness.

Stanley lifted his face and smiled down at Karen.

"Why, Karen Grill, you dead game little sport. You sweet little—"

"Oh, Stan," was all Karen said.

It was all she had a chance to say, for the next instant her lips were again prisoner and the world stood still.

COME BACK!

WE quarreled when we loved.
It's over now.
But still though life is calm
I wish, somehow,
That things could be the same
As they were then.
—Won't you come back and quarrel
Dear, again?

—*Mary Carolyn Davies*

The Girl on the Cover

TRUE LOVERS' NIGHT!

THE one night in the year when the spirits, properly approached, may deign to give the inquiring maid or man a glimpse of the future life partner.

For instance, there's the mirror test, which the Girl on the Cover is using.

First, the stage was set for ghostliness. Hobgoblins grinned from every corner; weird looking sheeted figures with skeleton faces lurked in the angle of the stairs. Dim and flickering lights intensified the creepiness of the scene. The spirits must feel at home!

Then the Girl on the Cover took her lighted candle in one hand and her mirror in the other and opening the cellar door stepped bravely into the rustling dark—backwards. She had to get to the bottom of those inky and threatening stairs before her Fate would be made known to her. And, of course, since she was so very pretty and appealing, *His* face appeared in her glass!

The Girl who lived in an apartment, without cellar stairs, could work the charm just as unfailingly another way. She would wait until the clock showed one minute to midnight and then seat herself before her dressing table mirror with an apple in one hand and a comb in the other. The house would be still as only midnight could make it, and from a crack in the window shade the solemn moon would send pale rays to disturb the shadows. As the awesome tones of midnight struck, the Girl would bite into her apple while she combed her hair, and as the last stroke died eerily away she would see in the mirror before her *His* face.

If the Girl on the Cover had simply wished to know how many nice things would happen to her in the next twelve months she would have stood so that through a window she might see the moon reflected in a looking glass she held. The number of reflections of the moon appearing in her glass would have told her.

Any ALL-STORY reader who is lucky enough to have a yard in these overcrowded days may try this plan: with a mirror in her hand she should step backward out of the door. Saying:

Round and round, O stars so fair
Ye travel and search out everywhere.
I pray you, sweet stars, now show to me
This night, who my future husband shall be!

she should circle the house three times, when her fate will be revealed to her.

Last night 'twas witching Hallowe'en
Dearest; an apple russet brown
I pared, and thrice above my crown
Whirled the long skin; they watched it keen;
I flung it far. They laughed and cried me shame—
Dearest, there lay the letter of your name.

Took I the mirror then, and crept
Down, down the creaking, narrow stair;
The milk pans caught my candle's flare
And mice walked soft and spiders slept.
I broke the spell, and stood the magic space
Dearest—and in the glass I saw your face.

And then I stole out into the night
Alone; the frogs piped sweet and loud
The moon looked through a ragged cloud
Thrice round the house I sped me light
Dearest; and there, methought—charm of my charms!
You met me, kissed me, took me to your arms!

Opper: The Charms

Planets of Destiny

By CAROL YOUNG

BY the application of the scientific principles of astrology your questions will be answered in these pages. But the publishers of this magazine, and also the conductor of this department, do not hold themselves responsible for the accuracy of the replies, inasmuch as many readers furnish incorrect birth data and others do not know the hour of their birth. This department is conducted only for such help or interest as readers may obtain from it.

One question is allowed each reader. Question must be accompanied by coupon to be found at the back of the book. Please do not ask questions concerning death, speculation or the whereabouts of lost property.

It is very important that you give the following data: time of birth (hour of the day or night), date, month, year and place. Also sex.

No personal questions will be answered by direct mail, but if you will send ten cents in stamps to cover cost of mailing, All-Story will be glad to return to you a short estimate of your character and of the future influences for those in your Zodiacal sign, giving suggestions for at least the next two years.

DAILY ASTROLOGICAL GUIDE

For the Next Two Weeks

October 18—This looks like a favorable day, with the evening and afternoon the best parts, in the order mentioned; go after what you want and get it.

October 19—Here is another good day; when they come in a bunch like this, the wide awake brother or sister combines efforts and gets results.

October 20—Look out for difficulties in the morning and afternoon to-day; the evening is not so bad, but still not safe for taking chances; be good.

October 21—While the day itself may not look bad to-day, anything started under the eclipse (any time on this date) would turn out poorly; better wait.

October 22—Average sing-song stuff should be the order of the day here; make it your business to keep out of trouble; don't start anything new.

October 23—Better conditions rule to-day than during the previous two; but still not sufficiently good for jumping off bridges, cliffs and airplanes.

October 24—Avoid wrangles and jams in the morning; the balance of the day and evening will take care of themselves; make yourself be cheerful.

October 25—A good day for study, travel and the planning of your affairs for the coming week; take an hour and look ahead intelligently.

October 26—Don't be too sure of yourself, for this is the sort of day on which some of our best people make mistakes; avoid quarrels in evening.

Google

October 27—If you have a chance to make a hundred thousand dollars in ten minutes today, it is a fake scheme and should be avoided.

October 28—Another almost total blank as far as getting married and starting other new matters are concerned; don't hurry and don't worry.

October 29—The best part of this day comes before sunset; after that it looks violent and hard to get along with, so keep out of trouble and be happy.

October 30—This is just one of those days; don't let it throw you and don't make the mistake of trying to throw it; follow your usual procedure.

October 31—Mentally good in the morning and early afternoon; but generally negative on new and important considerations after that; go slow.

WORK

"People who have half a dozen irons in the fire are not the ones who go crazy. It is the man of voluntary or compelled leisure who mopes and pines and thinks himself into the madhouse or the grave. Motion is nature's law. Action is man's salvation, physical and mental. He only is truly wise who lays himself out to work till life's latest hour; and that is the man who will live the longest and live to the most purpose."

Sorry, but I cannot tell you who said or wrote those wonderful lines—they came to me anonymously; but I would be grateful to any one among my readers who can supply me with the source of the quotation. It is one of my favorites.

Every doctor, when a patient comes to be diagnosed, should ask what work the ailing one is doing. If the patient admits that he or she is not regularly employed in some kind of honorable labor, that is what is the matter. I know, most of them think they would be working if they were well enough to do so; but in more than nine cases out of ten the truth of the matter is they wouldn't be ailing if they were doing a work in which they were enthusiastic. Remember the tale about the fellow who found his friend out in the field, digging a hole. "What are you digging for?" he asked. "Gophers, squirrels, woodchucks, beavers, rabbits—anything!" "Think you will find any?" "Ain't worrying about whether I will—got to find something; meat's out—nothing in the house to eat." But that's only part of why we should work.

If you are working merely to get the money with which to buy food and lodging so you can work for more money to buy food and lodging so you can work for more money, life gets to be something less than it ought to be.

If you are not in a line of work in which you are so contented and happy that you wake up in the morning with joy and gladness at the prospect of flying at the job before you with a keen zest for the results you know you are going to get and take pride in—then you are in the wrong section of the world's endeavor. Those who are happy in their work are getting so much money for their services that they are not bothering with the financial side. They don't need and they don't want vacations—they would rather be doing just what they are doing than anything else.

Try this test on yourself: ask yourself this question: "If I had twenty million dollars, what line of work would I take up?"

If your answer to that one is, "I would quit working!" you have something wrong with you and it will not be long before you will have to visit a doctor.

But he won't be able to cure you. No doctor ever cured any one who didn't want to get well.

So the doctor's next question should be to find out whether you are more than merely employed—he should learn whether you like what you are doing. If you don't, then he should help you get on the right track.

In something of that same way, I am a doctor here. People write in and want to know what is the matter with them, emotionally in most cases. Well, I can answer all of them in one big bunch, without looking at a single birthday in the whole outfit. Here is the answer.

A person who is enthusiastically and actively engaged in working to accomplish some big purpose, so nobody will have to ask "Who was John, or Agnes, Smith?" when they see a headstone fifty years from now—that person has neither the time, energy nor inclination to go wrong emotionally.

Those among us who slip and fall into the pitfalls of wrong marriage selections, crooked schemes and other things we have been trying to blame on the devil, are the people who haven't any purpose in life. They don't know what they are good for and don't seem to give a darn about it. Well, be like that if you think you would like it—but I can tell you right now, you won't. You will be going to the doctor, or to the lawyer, or to the astrologer, sooner or later to get some of your yarn untangled.

So I tell you here and now to go to work; and work as though you meant it. Don't let a single setting sun go down with you feeling that you have finished anything worth while, for that indicates you have a pretty small objective. It is time to get a bigger and better one farther on up the side of the mountain if you are satisfied, or if you are trying to push the hands of the clock around with your eyes after three thirty every afternoon.

As a starter, here is some work to do. And do it now.

Sit down and write yourself a letter, addressed to "Me, at the end of 1931." Tell yourself—that other self that you are going to be at the end

of another year—just what you expect of him or her. Put that letter away where it will be found at the proper time and then go to work to accomplish the things you have given yourself to do.

Get, if you can, and read "The Man Who Bossed Johnson." It was Johnson who became his own boss, driving himself around harder than did, or could, any other boss. Be like that. It will cure all kinds of rheumatism, nervous prosperity, ingrowing egotism, pride, false vanity, galloping laziness, or what-is-the-matter.

OCCUPATION

It might be a good idea to introduce right here a few horrible examples of the foregoing—but, I am pleased to say, I haven't any easily within reach, so I shall see what I can do to help along a few who want to work more intelligently than in the past. Of course, I cannot work for you, I cannot do your work—but, in the sense of being able to help each other, I can make suggestions based on your horoscopes. Here goes:

A. McC., born November 29, 1911, something out of doors, not with those of the opposite sex, having to do with the earth or machinery.

Mrs. J. F. F., August 25, 1898, traveling, detail work, but avoiding those of your own sex and all emotional matters.

R. A., May 25, 1911, you will never stay with any single occupation for a long time; make it your business constantly to better yourself.

M. B., July 21, 1901, you are in the right line; stay with it.

A. M. W., October 11, 1899, a rough period is coming your way, but you can make it easier by avoiding men in all personal dealings; literary work is O. K. if you are thoroughly practical about it all the way through.

G. D., April 26, 1914, deal in things that grow or come out of the ground, or in an occupation that has to do with financing.

H. E. D., June 19, 1895, you have been through the worst of it; hang on a little longer and be more cheerful about it; you will win.

Mrs. A. E. F., September 6, 1888, perhaps you will not make your biggest success in fiction and the movies or talkies, but stick to writing.

Mrs. M. S., July 21, 1887, you have the necessary qualifications for success in business; use more of them and you won't be able to complain.

A. E. S., September 30, 1913, learn all you can about what older women want, especially for personal beautification; that will be your line.

B. D., September 29, 1912, art and music on the business side; you would not take very well as a personal performer.

Mrs. J. S. W., February 26, 1891, you ought to be a good artist right now; certainly that is your line. Illustrating, for instance.

A. L. A., June 30, 1903, professional work is not your strongest ability; showmanship and detail are your rare gifts in combination.

Mrs. E. C. B., July 1, 1866, cannot recommend that you buy this year.

D. H. L. R., January 24, 1906, business management, politics and art work, or some combination of them.

M. O., November 17, 1916, avoid the mechanical and transportation lines; stick to something having to do with liquids and entertainment.

C. T. P., August 1, 1905, the designing work is better for you.

A. B., is December 24, 1906, your birthday or that of your husband? Let me have both when you write again.

E. J. T., July 18, 1909, mechanical and mental; advertising or reporting would be good occupations for you.

M. J. I., November 28, 1909, your work should be constantly changing; you could do well in a moving or selling line.

Mrs. B. E., March 25, 1889, yes, you could do well in business for yourself, but avoid men; deal mostly with women and in things they use; keep away from the electrical and mechanical.

Mrs. E. M. K., March 25, 1892, yes, if he doesn't lose courage.

E. S., May 21, 1910, stick to the art work; don't marry in a hurry, for that will be another experience for you; don't try to mix them.

Mrs. E. L., April 15, 1900, your appreciation of music is more valuable than your ability to perform; possible success as a critic.

H. H., October 11, 1893, this is a poor time to change—1930 or 1931—for you; you can succeed in any mental or philosophical work.

B. K., November 21, 1895, almost all right with you if you can handle the inside politics and secrets of what you are apt to be engaged in.

MATRIMONY SERVICE

Answers included under this heading are in regard to all kinds of questions—all the way from "Will I marry Willie Smith?" to "Will I ever have another good chance to marry?" You see, I don't care just what you ask, for there is only one question that I can answer. This is what I can reply to: "When will be the next best time for me to consider matrimony seriously?"

So I just turn all your questions about marriage into the one I can answer and go ahead with them that way. Like the old time barkeeper who said smilingly, "All right, gentlemen—what'll you have? Order anything you want. All I got is beer."

Following are the initials, birth dates and next best times for each of those mentioned to think about or make decisions on marriage, provided they are free of all prior obligations.

A. C. L., April 16, 1900—July, 1932.
B. R., August 13, 1912—October, 1936.
E. F., December 10, 1909—October, 1931.
A. G., January 7, 1900—October, 1932.
S. M., November 30, 1910—August, 1931.
M. M. C., August, 27, 1909—August, 1932.
W. M. P., December 18, 1913—November, 1936.
G. C. A., October 17, 1903—September, 1934.
B. M. S., November 27, 1913—November, 1935.
H. L., May 28, 1907—October, 1933.
Mrs. E. L. W., September 23, 1872—September, 1933.
D. L. V., October 5, 1906—November 1933.
E. E., September 18, 1911—August, 1933.
G. Z., February 12, 1908—September, 1934.
D. G., March 17, 1908—June, 1931.
N. E., August 22, 1912—November, 1936.
Mrs. O. T., November 22, 1906—July, 1931.
E. V., May 2, 1906—September or October, 1932.
M. L. B., June 4, 1884—November, 1933.
L. A., March 24, 1905—July, 1931.
Mrs. E. M. P., April 28, 1904—September, 1932.
F. M. B., August 22, 1875—August, 1932.
M. B., April 14, 1914—October, 1936.
F. C., May 7, 1909—October, 1932.
F. S., September 10, 1911—November, 1932.
E. L. F., April 21, 1914—November, 1936.
M. C., August 12, 1913—October, 1936.
Mrs. W. M., December 28, 1887—September, 1932.
M. R., November 14, 1910—February or September, 1935.
A. S., January 10, 1912—July, 1933.
L. J. K., March 22, 1911—November, 1935.
A. C., May 9, 1913—February, 1937.
D. F., November 28, 1912—December, 1935.
A. I. S., August 22, 1900—August, 1932.
P. C., July 10, 1910—May, 1931.
L. P., December 21, 1908—July or August, 1932.
H. C., October 14, 1910—December, 1933.
A. S., January 23, 1909—September, 1933.
F. G. B., November 2, 1880—November, 1934.
I. S., August 2, 1911—December, 1935.

BE SURE—

—to give *all* the information necessary when asking your question. Many readers make the mistake of giving "1930" as their year of birth and many others do not specify the hour of the day or night. These facts must be given before Carol Young can help you: year of birth, month, date, place and hour of the day or night. Also, remember that only one question is allowed each reader.

If you wish interpretation of your Zodiacal sign, inclose ten cents.

For coupon entitling you to Carol Young's services, turn to page 639

Handwriting and Happiness

By JOHN FRASER

JOHN FRASER, gifted handwriting expert, who has made a name for himself both in his native England and here in America, will analyze your handwriting. If you wish to know whether your sweetheart is the right man for you to marry, inclose samples of your own and your sweetheart's handwritings and address your letter to Mr. Fraser, care "Service for Sweethearts." If you wish his help in finding the profession for which you are best fitted, address him care "Your Career." For general reading, care "Character Analysis."

You may take advantage of one or any service, but a coupon must accompany each request for handwriting analysis. Coupon will be found at the back of the book.

Mr. Fraser bases his judgments on the scientific rules of graphology. In no case does he forecast the future or attempt to reveal the past. Scientific graphology undertakes only to reveal the inner secrets of your nature.

As many answers will be given on these pages as space permits. All other questions will be answered by mail. A stamped, addressed envelope must accompany your request for analysis.

THOUGH the question of unemployment promises to be a vital one during the coming months, personally I feel more concerned about the thousands of young men and women throughout the country who are potential wage-earners, but without any idea of what they are looking for in the matter of work.

Hundreds of letters come to my desk every week. From every walk of life comes the same story: "I have just finished school, but have no idea what I am best suited for."

Here is where ALL-STORY proves itself to be guide, philosopher, and friend to its countless readers who are in such a quandary.

To all such as are interested, let me point out the value of handwriting analysis in the matter of finding out what you are best suited for.

By all means take advantage of this service and send in your coupons with your check mark opposite "Your Career."

I will be delighted to help you.

SERVICE FOR SWEETHEARTS

I am writing to find
Janet
patiently waiting the results
Sam

(Miss Janet W., Beaver Falls, Pa.) The man you are in love with has ideas of his own. He is strong-willed and would be very opinionated. I can quite understand why you have "such an anxious time with him," as you put it. Though he has many commendable qualities from a practical point of view, he is not an ideal lover in my opinion. To a sensitive and nervous girl like yourself, his mannerisms and talk would be inclined to be boisterous. He is impulsive and loves to have authority. He is a good man's man, but when it comes to the finer things in life he is not one hundred per cent. I see very little romance in his make-up, but when it comes to the making of money, he is there "with the goods." I would be the last one in the world to discourage you about marrying Sam. I am not here for the purpose of breaking up romances. God forbid! But I would like to suggest that you think twice before you say "Yes" when he asks your hand in marriage. Wait a little longer, and perhaps another man will come along who will measure up in every way to the title of Mr. Right.

Kindly give an analysis of
Martha
I will appreciate it very
Jack

(Miss Martha F., Lincoln, Neb.) Your two natures are not so compatible to complete understanding and happiness as they might be. You both have distinctive dispositions. You will never be an echo of each other. You have your ways of thinking things out, and Jack has his. It's simply a matter of how much you are to give in to each other. If you can settle that between you, you will have gone far and accomplished much toward matrimonial felicity. Your fiancé looks out on life in a big way. He looks at things from a universal point of view and has little use for the small and trifling affairs which fill the horizon of so many of us. I notice he is far from being emotional. On the contrary, he would be much happier selling goods to a customer than sitting in the moonlight with a girl like yourself talking sweet nothings. He is simply not built for full-time romance, and consequently can never measure up to being an ideal lover. I don't say these things to make you unhappy, but you asked me to be candid about Jack. On the other hand, Martha, I think you are too young to take matrimony as seriously as you are doing at present. A girl of eighteen and of your temperament has never much steadfastness in her nature when it comes to affection. You would do well to wait another few years.

an analysis of my handwriting and
Bessie
like to know if you think I am
Harold

(Miss Bessie O., Lansing, Mich.) I read your letter with a good deal of interest and can clearly see why you don't understand Harold sometimes. Bessie, there are different ways of loving, and it may be that your boy friend thinks you are not a very enthusiastic lover at times. You are introspective and perhaps shy. Harold, on the other hand, is a rather exuberant youth who likes demonstrative emotion and action. You do not seem to me very demonstrative, and probably your lover thinks you give him scarcely any encouragement at all. Of course, you have all the earmarks of being a very nice little girl. Honest and sincere, and one who could make friendships very readily. Apart from that, however, you are reserved and—are you a wee bit stuck-up? You have strong likes and dislikes, and this, coupled with your temper, would make it hard for a man

to please you all the time. I grant that you have a few things in common with each other, but in the essentials you are poles apart. Among Harold's negative traits, I observe that he is somewhat vindictive and revengeful. He likes to have his own way, and possesses a mean temper when things don't go his way. If you two do get together and make up your minds to be married, I would advise you to have a clear understanding with each other first.

to be very interesting I
Lily
not keep me to decide as to
Henry

(Miss Lily McC., Dayton, Ohio.) I have to congratulate you on your choice of a sweetheart. In my opinion Henry is a fine, clean-cut boy who no doubt will develop into an honest-to-goodness man and husband. Your two dispositions blend very well, and I see you have many things in common with each other. Of the two you are the more generous. You evidently love to spend money, and how! Unless Henry has a mighty good income, you will have to rein up your spending propensities, and get a little more "Scotch" into your nature. I see you talk a little too much, Lily, for your own good. Your temper is not of the best, and your impatience must be trying to those who have to live with you. Your question about religions is a rather delicate one, and I would not care to discuss your particular case through the pages of ALL-STORY. I shall write you privately on that matter. It goes without saying that you are a spiritually-minded girl, and gravitate to the higher and better things of the world. Apart from these things I have just mentioned, I see no reason why you two young folk should not be very happy.

you for a very pleasant evening
Maggie
would appreciate a report of
Sam

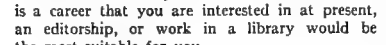
(Miss Maggie J. B., Hudson, N. Y.) I should say you are a lucky girl! Who wouldn't be with such a nice chap for a sweetheart as your Sam is. Somehow I fell in love with this boy myself. He is clean cut and straightforward in all he does. You will never find him wanting when emergencies arise. On the contrary, he will surprise you, for I see in him many excellent qualities which every red-blooded youth should possess—steadfastness of purpose, courage, sincerity, and patience. You evidently are a more gentle and refined person. Spiritual-minded I would call you. Sentimentally, you belong to the type of girls who require lots of loving. Sam, on the other hand, is not effusive in his love-making, as no doubt you have already discovered. But still waters run deep, Maggie, and I'm sure you will never be disappointed in your boy friend in the bigger things of life. Of course, I note one or two negative tendencies in his make-up which you may get angry about some day after the wedding. For example, Sam has a habit of keeping a lot of information to himself. He is a man of few words by nature, and consequently he may irritate you with his quietness of manner when you are "dying to hear" what's on his mind. Despite these little foibles, I can safely say that you ought to be a happy couple when married.

YOUR CAREER

me a career analyses.

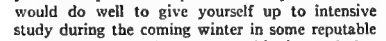
(Miss Dorothy McL., Concord, N. H.) Your handwriting impresses me with the fact that you have a very sensitive nature. Your analytical mind gets down to the marrow of every problem before you. You have a flair for the spiritual and mystical things of the universe. You have been cast in a fine mold. A librarian's position would be the best steady work I could advocate for a girl with your tastes and disposition. Of course, you have some qualities which could stand correcting. For example, you are irritable at times with those around you. There must be no waiting with Dorothy, when she wants something done for her. You are also particular and fussy about the way you do things. I further note

that you are romantic in your own quiet way. You are of the type who loves in silence and lives much within yourself. However, since it is a career that you are interested in at present, an editorship, or work in a library would be the most suitable for you.



(Miss Olive N., Attleboro, Mass.) Your letter interested me very much, but I'm sorry to say that I disagree with you. I'm not surprised that your boss fired you. It was unfortunate for you in one way, and a good lesson to you in another. My opinion is, though you are sixteen years of age, your mentality is far from being that old. In other words, you have much to learn before you can hope to fill a position in any office. You would do well to give yourself up to intensive study during the coming winter in some reputable business college. Your penmanship is much below the average, and your different characteristics are wobbly in the extreme. It is not my intention to discourage you, Olive, but if you hope to succeed in the business world, there are several things you would be all the better to know. For example, you will have to get over this tendency to procrastinate. This "putting off the evil day" will never get you anywhere. A little more reading of good literature would do you a world of good. In the meantime your knowledge is far too circumscribed. As regards a position, you are far from being ready for one. Self-improvement should be your first thought, and that for another two years yet.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS



(Miss Louise H., Hagerstown, Md.) Your penmanship impressed me with the fact that you have some of the best qualities we usually ascribe only to men. At any rate you know where you're going, and, with your will power and determination of purpose, you're going to get there. There is a lot of the forest oak about you. Your femininity is sometimes subordinated to your strength. Doubtless you are a "wow" in the office, and cheer the hearts of the company's executives with your splendid leadership qualities. No doubt they call you a go-getter and a reliable and conscientious employee. But—be careful, Louise, that you never let yourself be in danger of losing your more womanly characteristics. After all, the latter count for far more in the long run than the flowers that may be laid on your casket by the corporation which killed you with work! You have many commendable traits, but begin now, Louise, to make up your mind what you consider the *real* things of life.

(Miss Elsie M., Ashland, Ky.) You appear to have a well developed sense of business and technical matters. You are a girl who is full of pep and ambition. You have lots of gameness in your make-up, and just love to tackle a man's job. You have a fine sense of justice, and are sincere to the finger tips. Of course, you might be better to be less cock-sure in your opinions. There is just a little too much of the "I-know-it-all" attitude about you. I know you don't mean to be uppish in your manner, but unconsciously you give people the impression that you are. Another weakness that might be looked into is your poor memory. It is obvious to me that you are not much given to memorizing or of striving to remember what you have read. You may look at objects, but they seldom register in your mind. This is a pity, for you miss much by not storing away the scenes, incidents, and choice bits of literature which you are bound to come across in your way through life. Altogether, you are a well poised girl with many splendid inherent characteristics to your credit.

TURN—

to page 639 for the coupon entitling you to John Fraser's services. One coupon must accompany each request. And don't forget—when mailing your letter be sure to inclose a stamped, addressed envelope, since all questions not answered in these pages are answered by mail.

Heart-to-Heart

Tell Your Love Troubles to

AGNES
MERION
MORTON

MRS. MORTON wants you to feel that she is a friend—some one to whom it is a comfort to tell your problems, who will advise and encourage you in your struggle for happiness, and who is always here to help. She is interested in you. Write to her freely, addressing your letter care All-Story Magazine, 280 Broadway, N. Y. C.

Every letter is confidential.

As Mrs. Morton receives so many letters, she cannot publish answers to all in the space allotted to her. Some, therefore, are answered by mail. Be sure to inclose a stamped, addressed envelope with your question.

HAVEN'T we often noticed how many of the letters that come in at the same time seem to be concerned with the same problem? This week the letters are from girls who are supporting their men—if they can be called men. It may help to print two or three of them together.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

Of all the letters you have printed in ALL-STORY I have never seen a problem like my own. Here it is: My father and mother separated when I was a baby, so you can imagine what a time I had in the world. I have worked since I was twelve years old, was married when I was sixteen, and am eighteen now and divorced. About a year ago I met a boy—he's twenty-six, but just a boy yet. He is one of the sweetest, dearest, hatefulest, meanest men I ever met. Can you imagine such a person? Yet that is the best way to tell you what he is like.

He is not healthy and cannot hold down a good job. I have supported the two of us for the last eight months. Here is my trouble. He is good to me and will do most anything I ask of him, but he cannot and will not be true to me. I have tried to forget him *my very best*. Three months ago I caught him in a hotel with another woman, and I left him. He married her, but left her within a week. He called me up and said he was down and out and lost everything he had, and I told him to come to me. I welcomed him with open arms. His wife knows all about it, but doesn't care. She told me she did not love him and said I could have him.

We are together during the day; I work at night to keep us up. We have traveled a lot together and get along wonderfully well except when I get jealous and catch him lying to me. I can't give him up, as I've tried; I love him more than life itself. Is there any way for me to get him to be true to me?

His mother knows all and loves me as her own child. She talks to him, and to us both, and says I ought to beat him up when he won't be good. I have tried that, but he is stronger than I am and even for sassing him he has given me several black eyes. I'm carrying one now. I know he loves me in his way; he says he won't give me up.

What would you do in a case like this? Can you suggest any way to make him be more true and stop lying to me? We are going to be married as soon as his divorce comes through—at least, that depends on me. Would you? Don't tell me I am too young, as I have had more

trouble and experience than most girls twenty-five years old. Can you help at all?

HELPLESS.

P. S. Sounds like the girl that song, "My Man," was written about, doesn't it?

No, I'm not going to tell you you're too young, but you are certainly a fool for punishment. A girl with your experience—a woman, rather, who has already been through one unhappy marriage—ought to be a better judge of men by this time. There is nothing on earth you could do to keep that man true to you, because it just isn't in his make-up to be true to anybody.

Why can't you accept that fact and make up your mind to rid yourself of the curse of this love—for it is nothing but a curse—and, hard as it may be, cut loose from it while there still is time? You aren't "helpless" at all if you can only determine to help yourself. Put him out of your life; get right away from him and the town where he is. You will suffer, of course, but nothing to what you will suffer if you persist in rushing to your own doom. It is plain before your eyes—I don't wonder that the woman who was unfortunate enough to marry him said to you, "You can have him." No doubt she was glad to be relieved of the responsibility. As for his mother's advice, why didn't she try those methods herself when he was little? There might have been hope for him then.

You have not been happy in your life. Then why not lay the groundwork for happiness by refusing to listen to your love for an unworthy man? You can never expect to be happy while you are indulging yourself in an affection that you know full well is wasted on its object. Such men often have an indescribable fascination, and win love where more worthy ones sue in vain. But since you recognize his failings, you must try with all your heart and soul to get over it. Don't tell yourself, "I can't." Say, "I *will!*" And mean it. We can do anything we really make up our minds to do. You have not been willing to face the facts of the case—that's the whole trouble. You are too young to know it is impossible to make people over. He's the way he's made and can't help that, but your only safeguard is to run from him as fast and as soon and as far as you can. Build your life without him in it; it is your only chance for happiness or peace. And hard as it may be, it will not be so hard nor so lasting as the long, unending heart-break of trying to bolster him up all your life.

Write again if I can help at all. I don't expect you to believe me. The best thing I can hope for you is that he will leave you flat some day before you are legally tied to him, and that you will get over this infatuation because you have to. I know you won't while you can still delude yourself into thinking there is any hope—or what you would call "hope." Here's a letter from a girl who is supporting the man she "hopes" she's engaged to. Perhaps you can tell from your own reaction to her story just how yours sounds to any one else.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I have read your letters to others and I wonder if you can help me. I am going to tell my story and see. I have been going with a fellow for more than four years. When I was real young we made a promise that we would be married in a certain time. I didn't think much of the promise then because I only liked him, but as the years went by I seemed to fall in love with him. I try to do everything to please him. I will explain what I mean: giving him money and taking him places and buying him things. His one dream was to go on the stage, but you see, he didn't have the money to get there. About six or seven months ago a friend of his loaned him the money to take up tap dancing, singing and banjo lessons. He is getting along fine in his lessons and expects to go on the stage before Christmas. He made me promise to send him money to keep him until he went on the stage.

You see, I love him and he says he loves me, but whenever I say anything about the promise he always says, "Some day." I know you will think he's a cad for taking my money, but I promised to help him out and I can't go back on my word. He says that when he has made enough money to keep me he will marry me, but it is so lonesome and if I have any girl friends he's afraid they might get a boy friend for me, but you see, he is wrong. I don't care for other fellows. I suppose you will say he doesn't love me or he would trust me. His friend that loaned him the money is jealous of us. He doesn't want my friend to go with me. The way that he says my friend only wants me until he is on the stage then he won't care for me any more, but I asked him if it was so and he said no; he loves me and I should trust him. All my other friends say he just goes with me so I will send him money and they say that he will never marry me. Do you think that he will keep our promise? What shall I do? Please answer as soon as possible. Thanks.

WORRIED F.

Your friends are probably right—the man is not worth all you are doing for him. The way for you to prove this is to tell him that you are unable to keep on supporting him. There need be no unpleasantness (unless he makes it). Tell him that you must take back your promise because of family reasons. Say your mother or your sister needs your help, or you yourself have to meet some heavy unexpected expenses. By the way he takes the information you can judge him. If he is abusive, as I'm afraid he will be, your eyes should be opened to his true character. If he tries to wheedle it out of you still, you will have to realize that all he wants is what he can get from you.

My dear, even if refusing to send him any more money means giving him up now, you need not worry, for a man who will take money from a girl under such circumstances is about as low

as they come. Why shouldn't he work for what he gets, like other people—like any self-respecting man? Because he isn't a self-respecting man, that's all. If he had been he'd have gone to work to get what he wanted. And after he has sucked all the blood out of you that is in you, he will drop you anyway, so you might as well drop him first and begin to save your money to do something worth while instead of encouraging an idler in his idleness.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

This is the first time that I have gone to any one for help or advice of this kind. I trust I have not gone in vain. I am neither a flapper, nor what is known as an old maid, although single and over thirty years of age. I have traveled about a great deal and am considered just a good all-round sport; have met a lot of men of every description, but none have appealed to me as much as Ted. Ted is married, but has not lived with his wife for more than five years. I have known him about two, and in that time have found him to be on the level. Just recently he told me that he left his wife because he found her untrue. He is a home-loving man, clean-cut, and an interesting talker, also full of fun.

He had bought a home and was making good money, but every evening returning from work found the house in disorder, dirty, and wifie out She used to tell him she was at her mother's, but if he called there or went over after her he never found her. Then one night in a quarrel she taunted him with the fact that she had a lover. He could stand the situation no longer, and just disappeared. Her people are well off and she does not require his support. They have one daughter. She will not file suit for divorce, and he says it would please her very much if he was locked up.

I suppose you will say that I have no business going out in his company. That may be true, but he's very good as a pal, and always a gentleman, and if he were single he would like to marry me. I did not break up his home as he had been away from it for years before we even met. He does not play around like the other men, married or single, in this town. He's shy at times, but I know he loves me, although he has said he has no right to make love to any woman when he is not free. We are both past our first youth and are extremely unhappy over the circumstances. Are you going to tell me to forget him? I couldn't do that. I believe he needs my friendship, even if it can never be any more. His character and reputation are above reproach—so are mine. I have suggested that he go back to her, but he won't think of that. We have never quarreled, and he and she never did anything else. He says of course it takes two to quarrel, but she was always nagging and that's like poison to him. I have not heard her side of the story, of course, but I feel I know him well enough to believe his. If you can help us we'll both be grateful. HEAVY-HEARTED.

I am not going to tell you simply to "forget Ted because your experience is that of a grown woman, and deserves to be taken seriously. You are old enough to know your own mind; you have seen enough men to judge among them; and you certainly have formed tastes, likes and dislikes by this time, so that you can be sure when a man seems congenial that he is congenial to you in your maturity, and not to traits that you will outgrow.

Why doesn't he get a divorce himself? Your State's laws are comparatively lenient; he can call it neglect or desertion or cruelty; he need only have a notice posted in the papers which his wife may never see, and even if she fights the case I should imagine that he would have a fair chance of winning. A lawyer, of course, could tell him more definitely about that.

You do not tell me where she is living, but I presume it is at some distance, so it might very well be that he could get free without her knowing anything about it. If he wanted or was able to take the time off from business, he could go out to Nevada for three months and get a divorce on almost any story; but I see no reason why he cannot file suit right in your own town. Only one year's residence is required in that State. If he is earnest in his feeling for you, he should do that without delay—why hasn't he thought of it himself?

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I am writing to you for advice. You seem to help so many others, so I feel sure you can help me. I am a girl of twenty, and live with my aunt, who is a cripple and has been all her life. Now I am in love with a young man aged twenty-five. We have been going together for the past two years, and I am mad over him and he is mad over me. But my aunt refuses to consent to our marriage; she is afraid she will lose me entirely, and I'm the only one she can depend on. I am her only living relative; I have told her time after time that I will stay by her, but she just won't listen.

Now, dear Mrs. Morton, shall we get married without her knowing it? We just don't know what to do—we are getting desperate. He wants me to give myself to him anyway until we can be married. I love no one else, nor does he. What shall I do? Please answer.

HELEN.

Your letter is very appealing, and I admit you have a hard problem to decide. But I think you and your young man would be perfectly justified in taking the law into your own hands and getting married secretly. One does not like to be brutal, but when older people are so unreasonable there is nothing else to do sometimes.

You are of age; you are your own mistress, and your fiancé is certainly old enough to know what he wants, and to be sure of his affection for you. Even if your own mother was the one between you, you would still have the right to your own life, your own happiness. An aunt has

not the shadow of a right to demand such a sacrifice of you.

As for living with him before marriage, Helen, it would be infinitely wiser not to do that. So many, many people have tried it and lost their respect for each other. Or you might grow to love him more, and he tire of you. It is something deeper than reason—an old, old instinct as far back as the beginnings of civilization of the world. Only the exceptional man can accept that gift from a woman and keep her in the high place she held before. They can't help it; they are made that way, that's all. So face the fact and accept it. He loves you; he wants you; he feels sincerely that you and he can live that furtive life and still love each other. But, although he knows you love him only, he might come to distrust you with other men, to despise you because you had yelded. He could not help it; the bloom would be off his love. And if it developed into a "scandal case," and he had to marry you, either of you would never forget, and people would never forget. Every newcomer to town for years would hear about it even before meeting you—and the child itself would suffer from it all its life. It isn't right that such a thing should be true, but that's the way the world is made.

Marry him, Helen; take your happiness. Go back to your aunt together and break the news to her. She will have to "listen" then. If, after the first, she makes your lives a burden to you by her repinings, then you will have to tell her that you will leave her unless she adjusts herself to the fact of your marriage. It will be up to her. Sad as her case is, there is no earthly reason why you should give up for her this thing that means so much to you, perhaps your whole life's happiness. You can all be happy together if she will only be sensible about it. The old have no possible excuse for crushing the lives of the young; it is only when their own minds are warped that they try to do so.

Our friend the Lonesome Seaman, who started the recent heated discussion in these pages about the way nice girls treat men of the navy, has written again.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I am not one of Uncle Sam's sailors, but belong to the merchant marine, which makes it all the harder to meet respectable girls. One of your readers quotes the old saying that a sailor has a girl in every port. That, as far as I can find out, is only a joke. He hasn't a girl in any port, for, as I said, a girl of good reputation will not make a date with him. Do you think a sailor, regardless of what his reputation might have been, would go with a girl of low character if he could go with one of good? No. I'll say one hundred per cent would not, although your readers say almost all of us would. No, not if we could meet and go with people of good social standing to a show, a dance, or enjoy an evening at home. Perhaps there would be a few exceptions, but only a few. Surely there are enough exceptions of the men who work ashore. If there weren't, then why all the scandals one reads of every day in newspapers? *They* have every opportunity to get into the best of society, but a poor sailor, just because he is a sailor, can't go to a decent restaurant without being asked to take a back table.

Picture a man who has been to sea for twenty or thirty days without a chance for any recreation. He comes into port for one night only, as the ship I was on did many times. He knows no one. He sees lots of girls on the streets he'd like to meet and know and go to a dance with. Dare he speak? If he did, he'd find himself in jail. He'd like to take some one to a show, for few people like to go alone. Who? No one. Who cares to sit in a park alone, or go to Coney Island by himself?

As for going to church, which some one suggested, the sailor knows only one, The Seamen's Institute, and there the sermons generally are: "Come up, you sinners, and be saved." He walks the streets until he becomes tired and disgusted with the world. Then he does just what men ashore do when they feel the same way: he steps into a speakeasy, and there he finds not only liquor, but women of very low character. It's not long before his money is spent, he is drunk, and doesn't care what happens to his reputation. Yet if he had some nice girl to go out with or one at home to think about, to write to, and to receive letters from, it is my opinion that he would not do these things, and I think that you'll agree. How to meet them and be given a chance to prove that he isn't as black as he's painted is the question.

Still,

A LONESOME SEAMAN.

Unfaithful—Love does seem very deep and real at seventeen, doesn't it? But oh, I wish I could make you young girls believe that, no matter how deep and real it seems, it is not, ninety-nine times out of a hundred, the real thing. You love Tod as much as any one could love—at seventeen, yes. But some day you will be a woman, with a woman's heart and experience instead of a girl's, and you will look back and realize that this affection was only a false one, not the true and steady love that comes later on.

Dear, how can you really love and trust any one who makes you so unhappy? If this man loved you he would be kind and considerate, not jealous and exacting. He would never address you in such "rough and mean" terms as you describe. That sort of "love" from a man never makes a woman happy. His wife will be miserable, because he will unleash his furious temper whenever he feels like it—much oftener when he is married: there will be no restraint at all then. If he had married you he would not be in any fear of losing you, and that fear does restrain him somewhat from exposing himself too forcibly now.

Of course you ought to play fair and be on the level with him, but there is no good reason for so young a girl not to have other friends. If you really will listen to me you will get another steady, and let this bad-tempered and jealous boy strictly alone. That is what your own mother, if she were living, would tell you, I'm sure. I'd not see the married man any more, Belle. That isn't playing fair, either—but in the end you are the one who would suffer if you had too much to do with him.

Bound by Fate—You need to read some Unity literature about as badly as anybody I've ever heard of. Why grow into yourself and indulge yourself in imagining that you are singled out by a malicious fate as a special victim? You aren't that important! Wake up and snap out of this morbid, unhealthy attitude. Maybe we are "fated" for this or that, as you say, but how do you know it is your fate to be wretched all your life—and be like a wet blanket on other people's spirits? Honest hot temper is easier to put up with than dolefulness like yours. Maybe it's your fate to have a good time in life, to be worth while to some one—you don't know. It's certainly worth while to brace up and make the effort, to try to appreciate the beauty and goodness there is in the world, and not drag yourself around half dead before it's time to be all dead. As for the man—can you really think you want a shopworn specimen like that? You'd better change your standard of values. But, most of all, as I began by saying, get some Unity literature, take it out under a tree—and hear the birds sing.

Reader's Choice Coupon

Help the editors select just the kind of story you like best by telling them which story in this issue appealed most to you.

This coupon and four others from previous or future issues will enable you to obtain free an original illustration in this issue. Just inclose five coupons in your letter and a drawing will be forwarded to you.

THE EDITORS,
ALL-STORY MAGAZINE,
280 Broadway, New York City.

Here is my opinion of the stories in this issue:

Six Months to Live.....

True Lovers' Night.....

The Love Island.....

Romany Love .....

The Way to a Man's Heart.....

Cast Aside .....

The Loaned Engagement Ring.....

One Chance for Love.....

My favorite authors are .....

Name .....

Address .....

(Name and address may be omitted, if desired)

The Lonesome Club

Conducted by DOROTHEA DALE

MAKE friends! Join the Lonesome Club and soon you will be getting more letters than any one you know.

Here's how to do it: if you wish your letter published in these pages write to Mrs. Dale, care of ALL-STORY, *280 Broadway, New York City, and describe yourself. Try to make it as interesting as possible—tell little things about yourself that will make others want to write to you.*

If you wish to communicate with the pals whose letters appear here, inclose your letter in a plain, stamped envelope and send it to Mrs. Dale. No letters will be forwarded without the extra stamp.

If you are a girl, you may write to other girls; if a man, to other men.

Please do not ask for the address of any one.

DEAR MRS. DALE:

In a fit of desperation I have chosen this means of trying to secure a few friends. I know what it is to be lonesome. I've sat alone, night after night, just wishing for the companionship of a real friend. You see, I'm twenty-eight, old enough to have passed through the gamut of puppy love and of devious friendships, and I've come to the conclusion that you can have many friends, providing you don't know them too well.

My personal qualifications are nothing to brag about—five feet seven, dark, Gentile, in business for myself, and not particularly good-looking. But—I can write letters, and I'll be mighty glad to exchange correspondence with any one. All letters will be greatly appreciated.

ARTHUR OF MANHATTAN.

I am a girl of twenty-one and would like to hear from other readers. I am of light complexion, auburn hair, naturally curly, blue eyes, and weigh around 135. I'm a stenographer and considered good-looking. I enjoy dancing, swimming, and all outdoor sports. I also take a great interest in indoor sports. Please write, one and all; all will be answered smilingly.

DIMPLES OF NEW HAMPSHIRE.

I am a fifteen-year-old high school boy, blue eyes and light hair. I tip the scales at 135. I'm jerking sodas in a drug store, and enjoy reading and writing letters during the quiet hours of the day.

VAN.

I'm a man of twenty-one, five feet eight, blue eyes and dark hair, fond of all sports and also dancing. Come on, fellows, if you're in love, and write to some one else with the same disease.

JUST HARRY.

A girl of eighteen, five feet six, not bad to look at. I'm full of life and like all outdoor sports, dancing, too. I am interested in people older than myself. Come on, everybody making a success in life, write to

LITTLE ME FROM TEXAS.

Here I am, fellows, look me over and see if you wouldn't like to correspond with a sheik of the prairie, 'way out here in North Dakota. I'm a man of average height, weighing about 140, having weathered twenty-two summers. Now try and find out how we fellows pass our time out here.

JERRY OF THE PRAIRIES.

A girl of fourteen winters, five feet two, weigh 100, black hair, brown eyes, and fair complexion. I'm a lover of sports and have a weakness for dancing. Would like to hear from girls between fourteen and eighteen, especially from Hollywood and the West.

ANN OF ILLINOIS.

I'm seventeen, stand five feet three, weigh, 130, dark brown tresses, clear blue eyes and rosy complexion. I'm just a "bubbling brook" of happiness, have rare good humor, full of pep and "it," always seeking adventure with a kick. A real sport and the life of the party wherever I may be. I can climb ropes, trees, walk on my hands—other stunts as dextrously as a monkey! Do I have fun? I'll say!

Small-town life gets monotonous occasionally and I want a few pen pals to follow me in new adventures. Now, you girls who love thrills, sports and tricks, get busy and sling some ink my way. I don't care if you're short or tall, slim or plump, pretty or ugly, just as long as you are full of pep and not shy. Oh, yes, you must be not over twenty or twenty-one. I'd especially like to hear from girls interested in art and photography, my own hobbies. But all are eligible, and farmerettes are welcome, too. Tell me about yourself, because I'm going to choose the five or ten most interesting and snappiest for my pen pals. I wonder who will be the lucky ones. If you love new ways of driving the clouds of monotony away with fun and laughter, and get a kick out of writing and receiving snappy, jolly letters, hurry yours along, because I have a merry surprise for those lucky few who can follow me through my tricks.

AN IOWA BABE.

Girl of eighteen, have been married, five feet six, tall and slim. I live in a small town in Texas and am interested in those between twenty-two and thirty-two. I'd like to hear from every one who is trying to make or has made a success of life. BIG SIS.

Just another lonesome lassie longing for pen pals from all over. I have dark hair, brown eyes, and am five feet two. I am waiting for a pack of letters and promise to answer them all.

ALLIE OF N. Y.

Not really lonesome, but dying to hear from other States and countries. Everybody write, religion or nationality does not matter. One of us is seventeen, only five feet tall, very black hair, big brown eyes and medium complexion. My parents are not Americans, and I'll tell those who write all about their native land, myself, and interesting city. The other is sixteen, brown hair and eyes, four feet ten. Those who write won't be sorry. ALICE AND PAL.

I am a married lady
And have a little baby.
Have been married two years—
Hubby and baby are dears.
My age is twenty-one
And I'm really full of fun,
But I'm as lonesome as can be
As hubby works nights, you see.
So won't one and all write to me?

LONELY MRS. JOE.

I know every one makes lots of friends through the club, and want my share. I am average height, have average looks, just about average everything. I am twenty-four, married, and have one child. Enjoy most sports, reading, fancy-work and the movies, of course. Would love to hear from married women or single ones, if they would care to write. JUST MID.

I'm interested in every one and everything. A girl four feet eleven, weigh 95, am seventeen and a senior in high, auburn hair and big, dreamy brown eyes. I talk like Helen Kane and am considered cute. Come on, poets, dancers, young or old! TINY ME.

Five feet two or three, eyes blue-gray, blond wavy hair, wearing a long bob. Black eyelashes and eyebrows, weigh 111, have a nice coat of tan. I love all outdoor sports and dancing, will write to anybody, also exchange photos. I am very lonely—and seventeen.

LOUISE OF PHILADELPHIA.

I am sixteen, brown wavy hair and brown eyes, five feet two, fond of music stars and reading. I'd love to hear from girls who would like to hear about Florida. LOUISE OF TAMPA.

I am fifteen, brown hair and eyes, five feet three, weigh 117. I love all sports and like to read books.

EULALIE OF FLORIDA.

I want lots of pen pals, any age and from anywhere, single or married. I'm twenty-six, five feet five, weigh 145, have black bobbed hair and dark brown eyes. Fond of books, horseback riding, motoring; just love music and also athletics.

RUTH OF MINNESOTA.

I've read ALL-STORY for about six months and think it's great. I am twenty-two, six feet tall, dark brown wavy hair and blue eyes. I'm considered good-looking, and will answer all letters I receive from those who want an interesting story of the Philippine Islands.

SNAPPY.

I'm a little German boy, just sixteen, blond curly hair and five feet six, weighing 134. I like all sports, play on the Rotary baseball team, which has won the championship of the county. I'd like to hear especially from those around my age who are interested in sports. Won't some one write to me?

JOHNNY OF DECATUR.

I want to join the Lonesome Club, although I'm not lonesome, for I have many South African pals, but prefer to have some in other parts of the world as well. I'm a boy of sixteen, but I resemble a well-built man of twenty-six. Six feet six, dark hair, blue eyes, weigh 205. I'm full of energy and pep, and take part in the following games: swimming, hockey, football, cricket, tennis, golf, and I do riding occasionally. I play the piano and sing all the latest choruses. I'm a good dancer, but find it rather hard to get a suitable partner at a dance, unless I procure one beforehand. As I know your magazine is world-famous I expect letters from far and wide, which will be promptly answered.

LONNY.

I'm twenty-three and married, have two little boys. Have dark brown hair, blue eyes, five feet seven, weigh 120, am very fond of books and flowers. I'd like to hear from both married and single.

LONESOME PENNSYLVANIA GIRL.

We are two young girls from Iowa. Pat is a brunette, five feet three; Mike is slender, one inch shorter, and has reddish-brown hair. We have both been smitten by an overwhelming desire to write letters, and promise to answer every letter we get. If you don't believe that you know how to prove it.

PAT AND MIKE.

I have heaps of South African friends, but none overseas. I'm so lonesome and love writing letters. A lassie nineteen, five feet seven, black wavy hair, big brown eyes, fair complexion, not in the least handsome, but will pass in a crowd. I'm fond of animals, just adore swimming, rowing, riding, tennis and dancing. I'd love to have a letter from some one in Hawaii describing the scenery, and also letters from America. A lonesome South African girl, nicknamed

BONZO.

I've been accustomed to the "bright lights" and suddenly moved to a smaller town with not half as many activities, so am interested in your club. I'm not going to state the things I enjoy doing; let my pen pals find out for themselves. It's a lot more fun that way. I have black hair, fair complexion, five feet six, hazel eyes. I'm a girl, but they call me

BILL.

I'm another blonde with light brown eyes, fifteen, would like to hear from girls in California or Florida. My sports are dancing, reading, writing and, most of all, going to the shows.

MISSISSIPPI BLONDE.

I'm a great lover of writing and wish to make correspondents overseas. By profession I'm a teacher, keenly interested in anything educational, and also love sports and dancing. My desire to join your club is due to the yearning to learn about environments different from mine, and also to have pen pals who will make my life cheerful and pleasant.

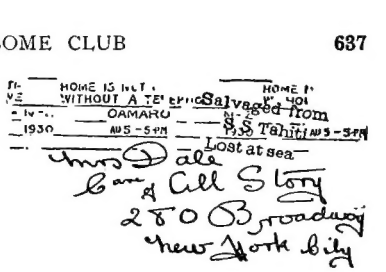
JOHN, SOUTH AFRICA.

I'm just fifteen, but I crave action and thrills. I'm a medium blonde and weigh 101, blue eyes, love dancing and story writing and would like tips on them both. Life is just an adventure to me, but it hasn't even started.

PEPPER OF IOWA.

I'm seventeen, five feet two, hazel eyes, light brown hair, weigh 98. I graduated from high a year ago, have been to a business college, and am now working in an office as private secretary. My hobbies are reading, dancing, swimming, motoring and most of all writing letters. Hurry, girls; it's almost time for the postman to take your letters!

SALLY OF MICHIGAN



Those of you who saw the motion pictures of the ill-fated *Tahiti* as she foundered, will be especially interested in this letter which was among the mail saved from the sea:

Hello, everybody! I don't suppose you have a few minutes, have you? If so, do send me a few letters please. I am twenty, fair hair (fair, fat and forty-two, I don't think). As for my eyes, I cannot say because I don't know what color they are. I'm in love with all sports and life in general. I am looking forward to lots and lots of letters, so please all you people don't let me down. I don't happen to be a man hater.

O. K. NEW ZEALAND.

I'm a young married woman twenty-six, have two children, both babies. I'm five feet three, weigh 117, have brown hair and dark eyes, olive skin. Would like to hear from any one who is lonesome. I'll do my best to write interesting letters.

MAE OF WYOMING.

Although I'm a composer of many popular pieces which have been very successful, I am still lonesome. Perhaps that is partly my own fault. I write all my music under my popular name and do not use that name in everyday life—too much publicity is not good. Is this not so? Perhaps if I did use my public name I'd have all kinds of friends in my home town, but I do not care to make their acquaintance that way. I'm a young fellow of nineteen, dark brown curly hair and dark brown eyes, five feet eleven, medium complexion. I like to dance, play piano (of course), play tennis, golf and what not. My immediate friends have named me

JAZZY.

Just another girl of twenty wanting loads of pen pals. I love to correspond and have been doing so ever since I was eleven. I sure hope I receive many pen pals—young or old—through this interesting club. My hair is blond and my eyes are blue. Five feet four and weigh 108.

EDDIE OF CHICAGO.

A girl of seventeen, light hair and blue eyes, five feet tall and weigh 105. I sure am lonesome, so please find some pen friends. I love to read stories of all kinds; want to write people all over the world, and wish them all the best of luck.

LONESOME MAVIS.

I'm very lonesome and want lots of pals. I'm five feet two, weigh 94, brown hair and eyes,

considered good-looking. My favorite sports are swimming, tennis, skating, etc. I like dancing. My hobby is going out with boys. I'd like to hear from any one, any place, any time.

BABE OF MASSACHUSETTS.

I'm five feet two, black hair, brown eyes; some people say I'm good-looking and some say not. I like swimming, skating, and dancing. My hobby is going out with fellows and raising Cain.

MARY OF MASS.

I'm twenty-two, five feet six, brown hair and eyes, and some people consider me pretty. I'll answer all letters, no matter how young or old the writers may be.

MRS. TEXAS JOE.

I live in a small town and as I'm used to a big city I'm very lonesome out here. I'm sixteen, dark brown hair and gray eyes; my friends tell me I'm pretty, but of course you can't believe everything you hear.

ELLEN OF MISSOURI.

I'm seventeen, dark blue eyes and dark (kinda) wavy hair. A senior in high, love to swim, play basket ball and hike. Hobbies are dancing, reading, writing and movies. I'm of Italian descent and would appreciate a line from Italian girls.

"PIA."

I'm a Canadian girl of eighteen, and think it would be very interesting to have some pen pals.

B. C. OF OTTAWA.

I'm fifteen, brown hair and eyes, medium complexion, weigh 87. I love sports and am especially fond of dancing. I can toe dance and do acrobatics. I love to write and receive letters. Pen pals, please write and exchange snaps.

SUNNY OF INDIANA.

Come on, you Chicago chaps, and write to one who promises to answer all letters and to meet you personally. Nineteen, five feet ten, dark eyes and hair. Enjoy all modern sports and everything.

PATENT-LEATHER KID.

A girl just twenty-one, five feet three, weigh 118. My favorite pastime is writing letters, and I'd like to receive many more from everywhere. A snap with a smile for every one who answers.

DIMPLES OF W. VA.

Nineteen, a brunette, lover of all sports; at present earning my own living, though my parents are living. Have plenty of time to answer letters. Can dance and seem to make friends easily. A "good" picture to all who answer.

JUST FRAN OF PA.

Fourteen, brown hair and eyes, five feet three. I'd like to hear from girls twelve to seventeen. Love swimming, baseball, picture shows and many sports.

LONELY ALICE OF TEXAS.

Twelve years old and a Campfire Girl. Light hair, sort of golden in the sun, blue eyes, quite tall. I love adventure, mysteries and excitement, have many friends here, but don't get many letters. Please get me a pen-pal-less girl not over sixteen, of my own type. I am motherless—my mother died when I was five months old.

ROBERTA.

A sophomore in high, brown hair, blue eyes, five feet six, seventeen years old. I like to read and swim, and will welcome any pen pal who writes. Will exchange snaps.

GREEN MOUNTAIN GIRL.

A girl of fifteen with golden-brown hair, stormy blue eyes, lovely sun-tan complexion. Now I'm far from beautiful, but folks say, "Looks don't count." I love sports and dancing, although reading and horseback riding are my favorites. Would especially like correspondents from the South and West, but hope every one will answer.

CHUCKLES, THE OUTLAW.

Nineteen, five feet three, 117, light brown hair and gray-green eyes. I like all sports and the show world. Am always interested in what's to be found just over the hill.

MISSOURI GIRL.

Oh, gosh—oh, gee,
Won't some one write to me?
I'm slim and tall,
And really not dead at all.

Five feet five, have dark hair and brown eyes, go in for sports and dancing. Let's exchange letters and snaps!

MISS JACKIE OF IOWA.

A boy twenty, five feet ten, weigh 154, dark brown hair and blue eyes. Tennis and swimming. Please help me get pals all over the world, as I'm really lonesome.

JOHNNY OF LOUISIANA.

Girl of eighteen, five feet five, 118 pounds, black curly hair and blue eyes, fair complexion. Dancing and sports. I love to write—going to college this fall.

PATTY OF GEORGIA.

Fifteen, brown hair, hazel eyes, five feet three, eager for pen pals. I will exchange photos and other things and reply promptly.

LITTLE BROWN JUG.

I'm blue, too, and surely need some one to cheer me up. Can you feature a redhead being blue? Hard to realize, but won't some please rescue me before I get down in the dumps?

BLUE REDHEAD.

Nineteen, gray eyes, brown hair, interested in all sports, especially dancing and tennis. Come on, now, and let me hear a lot from you fellows between eighteen and twenty-one.

LONESOME JACK OF UTAH.

I am twenty-seven and a native New Yorker, five feet eight, weigh 150, gray eyes and black hair. I have traveled all over this country and when I returned I found all my friends married; they no longer have time to see their friend who is single. I'm lonesome and find time heavy on

my hands, so would appreciate some one to write to. I'm athletic, and love also reading, dancing and good music. WHITE WAY.

I am sweet sixteen, five feet three, weigh 101, auburn hair, light brown eyes, and my four weaknesses are: swimming, dancing, tennis and golf. SPANISH-AMERICAN LYDIA OF OLD MEXICO.

I am thirty-one, five feet four, light brown hair and gray eyes, lover of home and outdoor sports. My hobbies are reading, movies and pen pals. V. V. OF PENNA.

I am a married girl for three years, brunette, five feet three; favorite sports fishing and dancing. Would like to hear from married or single. RUTH OF FLORIDA.

How wonderful ALL-STORY has turned out to be! I'm a lonesome girl from a horrid old mining town, small with light curly hair and blue eyes. They say I'm not bad-looking, but don't get excited. If I've anything to shout about I can't see where it is. BLONDIE FROM MONTANA.

I'm fourteen, five feet three, blond curly hair, shoulder-length, blue eyes. I'm usually taken for sixteen or even eighteen—it's just natural, for I don't try to make myself look older. I indulge in every sport, can tap, buck and wing. I love witty people and not ones who mope. My friends tell me I'm pretty and have a nice shape, but I am not conceited, so it goes in one ear and out the other. SALLY OF NEW YORK.

I am sweet sixteen, five feet eight, dark brown hair and dark blue eyes. I'm fond of bridge, dancing and golf and driving my Whippet. Best wishes to the Department! SWEET SIXTEEN OF MISSISSIPPI.

I'm five feet seven, dark brown hair and eyes, a modern young married woman, full of fun and love to have a good time. DIXIE.

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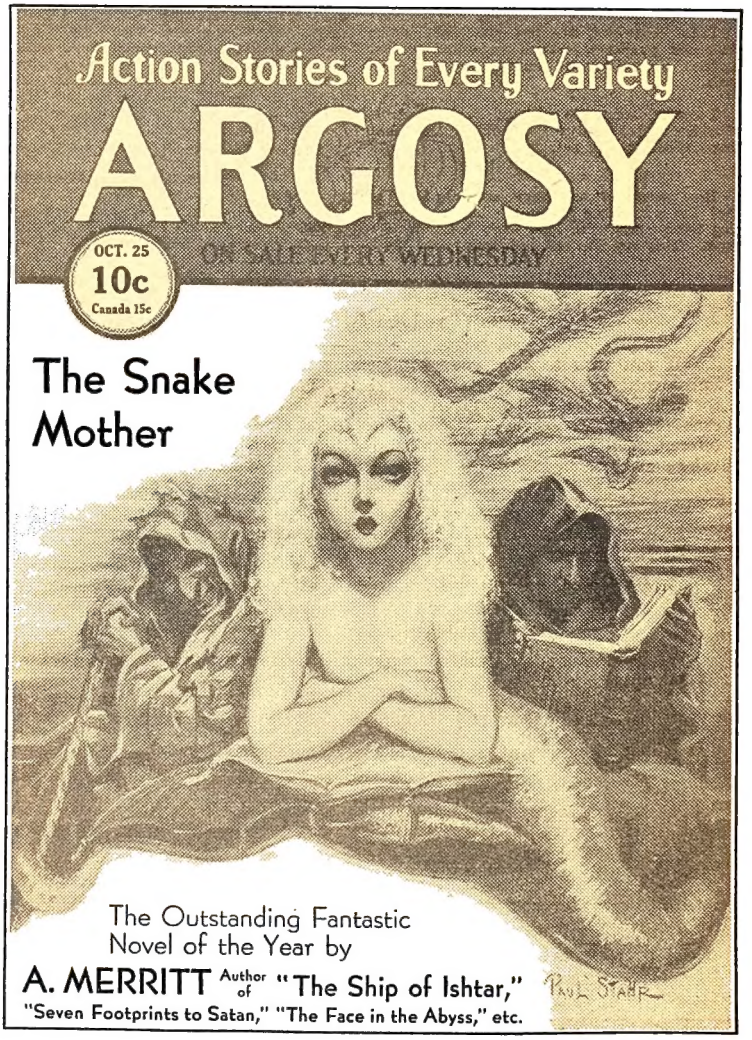
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